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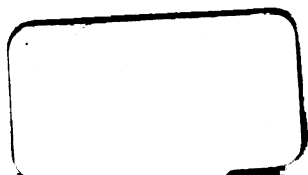


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SMILING PASS
A SEQUEL TO
"SMILES"
A ROSE OF THE CUMBERLANDS
By ELIOT H. ROBINSON

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SMILING PASS
BEING A FURTHER ACCOUNT OF
THE CAREER OF
"SMILES," A ROSE OF THE CUMBERLANDS

BY ELIOT H. ROBINSON

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“ ROSE TURNED AND WAVED HER HAND ”
(See page 244)

SMILING PASS

Being a Further Account of the Career of
"SMILES": A ROSE OF THE
CUMBERLANDS

BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON

Author of "'Smiles': A Rose of the Cumberland," "The
Maid of Mirabelle," "Man Proposes," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN GOSS



THE PAGE COMPANY

BOSTON



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TO
MY MANY MOUNTAIN FRIENDS
IN
OUR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS
WITH WHOM I HAVE LIVED AND LABORED
THIS STORY IS CORDIALLY DEDICATED

FOREWORD

No pen picture which has yet been drawn in literature portrays with any completeness the actual conditions of life among the isolated dwellers in our own Southern Highlands. It is usual with the novelist, even if he writes from knowledge rather than imagination, to select—as is his right—only the brighter tones to color his romance; while the sociological writer sees only the drab and somber shades of disagreeable facts and paints his picture accordingly.

Both exist in full measure, mixed together, and it has been the author's purpose in this story to describe life as it really is, to-day, among that strange mountain people which has its habitation geographically so near to our twentieth century civilization, yet is actually so remote therefrom, almost completely isolated within its containing hills. The subject is so varied, so complex, however, that he makes no pretense of having done more than depict certain phases of it in sketchy outline, but with accuracy.

If he has at times seemed to draw a picture of an existence almost incredibly harsh and crude for a part of our own country settled by our forefathers more than a century ago, it is because that crudity and harshness *exist*—a hundred years have passed

over the greater part of that mountain region, so difficult of access, and left almost no perceptible trace of their passage.

"Smiling Pass" is fiction, purely, yet it is fiction interwoven with facts, whose authenticity is vouched for. And the facts which the author has set down are not recounted in any spirit of harsh criticism, but with all sympathetic friendliness, and in the hope that those who may read this volume may come to a fuller understanding—and be charitable. For he has lived among these "our contemporaneous ancestors" and loves them.

In the story to which this is a sequel, the mountain child, Rose—whom men called "Smiles"—courageously fought her way out of the shadows which invest life in those isolated hills. It is the story of an individual, simply. Herein Smiles turns her face again to her beloved mountains to help those others who "haint never hed no chance" to help themselves.

It should be stated that "Smiling Pass" is a purely imaginary spot which might be located in the mountain fastnesses of any one of the five states sharing in the Southern Highlands. Work not unlike that which is started here is being nobly carried on in places there to-day. Similarly, the characters introduced, although true to life, are not patterned after any particular set of people. This is said because the author does not wish any of his mountain friends, among whom he has dwelt, to feel that they have been used as "material". At the same time he de-

sires to acknowledge his deep indebtedness to them all, and in particular to one—now a law abiding citizen and deputy sheriff, but not long since an outlaw and moonshiner—whose original song is put into the mouth of “Bad Bill” Cress in the latter part of the book.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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PART I
THE CAUSE

SMILING PASS

CHAPTER I

MOUNTAIN AND CITY

OUT of the mysterious shadow that began at the very edge of the ice-fringed creek and abruptly reared its mountainous shape into the night heavens to end in an irregular peak, whose rocks were sharply outlined against a ragged sky, three men appeared, riding slowly.

Their mounts—the first a graceful, blooded horse which bore a soldierly young form, and then two mules, the second of them almost gigantic, as needs must be the bearer of such a bulky human burden as the man whose mighty thighs bestrode it—splashed diagonally through the turbulent waters of the creek, now swirling about its innumerable boulders in scrolls of frosted silver; three misty silhouettes momentarily thrown into relief against the shadow background by the cold light of the mid-winter moon.

In turn the plodding steeds lurched up the further bank and approached the spot where, at the base of another precipitous Cumberland Mountain, whose

rockribbed and forest clad slope was more clearly revealed, a thin, perpendicular line of ruddy light disclosed the entrance to a double log cabin. Its low, oblong structure and steeply slanting roof could be vaguely seen nestling in a little hollow amid leafless poplar trees and magnolia bushes.

The youth in the lead swung himself lightly from the saddle, turned and called back, "Better get down, Judd."

"Reckon I'll go on daown," curtly responded the second rider.

"You then, Billy. Come in; spend the night."

"Don't guess I kin. You cum daown with us," the giant replied in a rumbling drawl.

"I can't, to-night. Better stay."

"Reckon I'll git erlong. Ho-a, step on, Liza Jane." The big mule moved on in the trail of the other one and disappeared amid the shadows.

After putting his own mount in the shapeless log structure which served as a stable, the youth entered the cabin by one of the two doors that diagonally faced each other on either side of the huge fieldstone chimney, at once bisecting and uniting the dwelling.

"That you, Virgie?" The question was uttered in a girlish, sleepy voice behind him, as he stepped to the fireplace built of sandstone blocks to thaw his stiffened fingers over the heap of embers which still glowed red on the hearth. Simultaneously a child-woman of perhaps fourteen years appeared in the doorway, having crossed over from the other of the

two rooms which comprised the double cabin. She was barefoot and her form, slender and graceful, was clothed in a single-piece dress of faded gingham, which served alike as nightgown and a visible evidence that she had already made a marked advance over most of her neighbors, who were doubtless at that moment asleep fully clad or—at the most—in their everyday undergarments.

“Go on back to bed, Omie!” commanded the youth. “It’s a bitter cold night and you’ll freeze, standing there like that. Look at the snow on your feet! Is mother asleep?”

“I reckon.”

Instead of obeying his injunction the girl shook back the mass of unbound chestnut hair from her sleepy eyes, pushed forward a handmade stool with seat of woven hickory bark, stripped thin and smooth, and dropped thereon, with her bare feet extended to the comfortable warmth. The man tossed an armful of split logs onto the quarry-stone slabs which served as andirons, then knelt and blew steadily on the embers until the wood had begun to blaze merrily, its colorful light illuminating the simple, windowless room.

Then he, too, drew up a stool.

“What luck?” asked the girl.

He laughed, a little bitterly. “Nothing doing. It’s apparently a brand new idea to Uncle Sam and he can’t get it at all.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Virgie.”

"It's all part of the game. Perhaps some other way will be opened. Darn it, it *must*." He spoke doggedly.

For a little while brother and sister talked together, in low voices. Then the girl frankly yawned, arose, kissed him and ran back across the little snow-covered porch to her bed in the other room.

The youth went to a rude shelf on the further wall, took down a book and, half-turning his straight back to the firelight, began to read.

The cover to the volume bore the title, "Lives of Great Leaders."

"Come in, boys and thaw out. Brrr! It's almost as cold in here as it is out-of-doors. Apparently our estimable janitor hasn't yet heard that the war is over."

"Probably he's become so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of conservation during the late unpleasantness that he unconsciously continues to apply it—to his energy," another voice in the darkness answered.

Dr. Bentley's groping hand found the electric switch and there was light. He laughed as he replied, "Well, if you'll have patience I'll promise to 'make it hot for you' in a minute."

While the other two were divesting themselves of their big fur coats their host busied himself before the tapestry brick fireplace, laying the split birch logs and kindling with an experienced hand. One of his visitors began to fuss with the radiator valve with the familiarity of a frequent visitor, while the other, a

stranger to the room, stood heavily planted on two muscular legs and looked critically about him. Although his countenance retained its customary immobility, which had earned for him the jocular title of "the man with the iron mask"—a title never spoken to his face, needless to say—a physiognomist might have found the suggestion of a sneer in his eyes, as they traveled slowly about the cosy study with its many artistic and costly furnishings.

Perhaps he was contrasting it, and unfavorably, with his own bare chamber, for, whatever anyone might say about Dr. John Hunter, all agreed that he was a worker and a fighter who allowed nothing to detract his attention from whatever goal he purposed to achieve. The pleasant superfluities of life, mental or material, held no place in his plan of living. This fact might, indeed, have been gathered from his face, which was strongly moulded, with rugged features, black eyes that seemed to bore into the object of their gaze from beneath heavily over-hanging brows, and a broad mouth whose compressed lips appeared incapable of smiling. That he was, indeed, an indefatigable worker and already unquestionably on the road to becoming an able physician was almost all that was known about him by his two companions, although rare remarks which he had dropped concerning his past had led them to understand that he had come from Tennessee, been born in poverty and fought his way through an education which he was now completing at the Boston City Hospital. All else was conjecture.

Philip Bentley completed his task to his satisfaction, struck a match and briskly exclaimed, "Ready, aim, FIRE!"

The flame caught the corner of the underlying paper, there was a muffled "*whuff*", a merry crackle and in a moment the grate was beginning to lend warm encouragement to the radiator's half-hearted efforts. The host offered cigars and cigarettes, both of which Dr. Hunter refused, proclaiming his preference for a blackened briar pipe which he stuffed with slice-cut from his own leather pouch. As he did so he moved ponderously to a place before the fire, and now pointed with the pipe's stem to a photograph in a handcarved gold frame, which held the central position on the mantelpiece.

"How does it happen that you're still a bachelor, Bentley, when you have the picture of a girl like *that* in the place of honor?" he demanded in a deep voice, which always somehow gave the impression of heavy feet plodding forward.

Fortunately for Philip the speaker's back was turned towards him, and he therefore could not observe the quick flush which overspread the young doctor's sensitive, attractive face. The innocent question had brought back bitter-sweet memories.

After a brief instant he answered in his customary laughing tone, "Oh, *she's* only my sister."

"Congratulations on having one such. Women have no place in my life—haven't time for them—but if I ever should marry I'd try to seek a wife of exactly that type."

"Well, you're too late to 'speak for yourself, John'," answered the other visitor, Dr. Neale. "At least in the present instance, for she's happily married already."

"The desirable ones usually are. That photograph, now—I'm no judge of art, neither time nor inclination for it, but it strikes me as probably a good likeness, it's so full of character. And there's something a bit remarkable about it, too. The face is serious enough, but somewhere, either in the eyes or about the mouth, there's the lurking suggestion of a latent smile. I like it."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Neale exclaimed. "Here, let's look at that—it must be a 'speaking likeness' if it instantly suggests her appellation to an entire stranger. Yes, I might have known it. They're there, Phil."

"What are?" inquired Dr. Hunter.

"'Smiles', old fellow. And thereby hangs a tale. Tell him the story, Phil; it should interest him, for apparently their early histories form somewhat of a parallel. The telling will take just about long enough for us to get properly thawed out. If only the war had not placed the shackles of National Prohibition upon us, perhaps mine host would . . ."

"He would not and it *did* not—here," broke in Philip, decisively. "'Smiles' brought it to pass before our Uncle Samuel thought of it seriously. As for the yarn, if you want it told, and Hunter cares to hear it, turn narrator yourself while I see if the mail box holds

anything beside the usual first of the month 'please remits'—if I may be excused for a moment."

His guests nodded assent and Philip stepped to the door while Neale remarked, "'Barkis is willin', if you think that you would be duly interested in the story of the most popular nurse who ever trod the floors of the C. H., Hunter."

The other looked back at the photograph. "I'm sure that I should be," he answered. "So she is a Children's Hospital graduate?"

"Yes, and married to a specialist in children's diseases whom you probably have never met, since they have both been in France, working with the refugee children, for more than a year—he almost continuously since 'fifteen—; but his name—Donald MacDonald—may be familiar to you."

"Not the man who had such success in operating for brain tumors?" There was a new, eager light in Hunter's deep eyes. An appeal to the man might stir him only mildly, but one to the physician instantly aroused his interest.

"The same."

"That's a coincidence. I've just finished reading a monograph on that subject by Dr. MacDonald, and was wishing that I might meet and, perhaps, study with him."

"Hurrah! Speaking of angels," cried Philip from the doorway, as he boyishly waved a bulky envelope above his head. "I've been waiting for a letter from Rose for weeks and to-night's mail brought it. Sit

down, boys, and you, Tom, string your story out, like a good chap. I'll be a poor host for some time to come, judging from the external dimensions of this epistle."

"Go to it; I'll do my best, although I know merely the sketchy outlines of Smiles' story," answered Dr. Neale. With cigars and pipe alight the three men seated themselves in a semicircle before the friendly fire and, while Philip busied himself with his letter, the narrator commenced his recital by saying, "I wonder if your imagination is strong enough to carry you into the heart of the Cumberlands, with its romantic feuds, hidden moonshine stills, picturesque people . . ."

"*Are* its people picturesque?" abruptly demanded the other.

"Why, I've always been led to believe so. Didn't you ever read any novels on the Cumberlands . . ."

"Never read novels. Well, go on. I shouldn't have interrupted, but . . . I happen to have a superficial acquaintance with the Southern Highlands and I guess that I can paint the picture."

"Better than I can myself, probably, if that's the case. Well, it was into that region that Don went on a tramping trip some ten years ago."

As Neale continued with his introductory sentences Hunter found his attention focused rather on their host, whom he was half-facing, than on the storyteller and he caught himself thinking, "So she's his sister. They don't look in the least alike and I'll wager that they're not."

Psychological analysis was his one hobby—if anything so intimately related to his profession could be called an avocation. Now, while he listened to Dr. Neale, he unconsciously studied the other man, upon whose countenance varying emotions were being clearly depicted as he read.

“Bentley’s certainly an odd mixture,” he mused, for a moment giving more attention to his own thoughts than to the story. “He’s gifted—or cursed—with a peculiarly sensitive soul, for a guess. And he’s a bit of a genius; he never got his proficiency as a surgeon through the grinding work which has been my portion. Highly sensitized; almost like a woman; got emotions—he keeps ’em under cover pretty well, except when he’s off his guard, as now—but I’ll bet he touches the heights and sounds the depths as well. I don’t envy him, poor devil. And, Lord, how skinny!”

His coldly appraising gaze took in Philip’s long, slender legs, now stretched out to the warmth of the blaze, and the nearest suggestion of a smile which ever showed in his piercing eyes appeared for an instant as his thoughts reverted to one afternoon when the other had laughingly characterized himself as “the closest human approach to the geometric definition of a straight line—that which has one dimension only, namely length,” and had declared that if they were to look, and see nobody, it would probably be he, standing side view.

“He *is* built more like a slender woman than a man,” thought Hunter, as he glanced down at his own

muscular legs and brawny hands. "But he's rather surprisingly strong, for all that. Wonder where he stores all his nervous energy?"

The analyzer's gaze returned to Philip's patrician face, crowned with its thick, blond hair which was brushed back from his high forehead in a series of well-defined waves. At that moment its look was one of deep concern, and the usual laughing light in his clear blue eyes had been supplanted by an expression of almost womanly sympathy.

"What a damned shame!" Philip's explosive exclamation interrupted the story and the analysis alike.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" interjected Dr. Neale, solicitously.

"Well, rather. Don . . . Wait awhile, until we've both finished our stories and I'll tell you. Humble apologies for my interruption."

The other continued and Hunter found himself becoming more and more interested in the recital. Indeed, he entirely forgot the presence of his host until again reminded of it by another exclamation, this time uttered in a tone of pure pleasure, "Bully for you, Rose—bless your heart!"

His two guests looked up from the glowing fire to see him smiling, but he answered their interrogative glances merely by shaking his head.

Folding the letter carefully, Philip replaced it in its envelope and then sat, silent, except for the occasional addition of some detail, until Dr. Neale ended his recital with the words, "And that concludes the

story of little Smiles whom we used to call 'The Rose of the Cumberlands'—if marriage *is* the conclusion of any life-romance."

"As, of course, it is not," Hunter responded, quietly. "Thanks, it *has* been an entertaining story—but the real drama may be in the making; one never can tell. By the way," he added, addressing Philip. "How old is your 'little Smiles'—if the question is not an impertinent one?"

"Twenty-four, next summer."

"And so really just approaching the most interesting age in woman," said the other.

After a little sympathetic discussion relative to Dr. MacDonald's ill-fortune, recounted by Philip, the other two bundled themselves up and took their departure. Their host accompanied them to the door and, returning, turned off the electric light. Then he resumed his place before the hearth. For a time he sat there, deep in thought. Then he took out the letter again, turned his slender, straight back to the fire, and re-read its closely written pages by the changeful illumination.

CHAPTER II

SMILES' LETTER

"SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,"

November 1, 1918.

"Dearest Philip,

So you dare call me an unsatisfactory letter writer, sir, after Donald bestowed upon me the title of 'the perfect correspondent!' I seem to hear you answer in your musical voice, 'But there is a world of difference between writing to a brother and to a lover'. Perhaps it is true and—to become serious as I shall have to, soon, for this letter must be keyed chiefly in the minor—I cannot blame you for complaining a little over my *epistolary derelictions*. (Imagine 'little Smiles' of six or seven years ago using such language! I can scarcely myself believe that I am that same girl, so much has happened in so short a time. *Me*, a truly trained nurse, a city dweller, a year-old married woman, and, for a year, a resident of France—a country which was once as far away and as unreal to me as the lost Atlanta, despite my love for it as the home of 'Jone of Ark,' as I used to spell my childhood's idol! Incredible! I must be dreaming!)

Perhaps, before you are through reading this you will regret your taunt, for I have not only a deal to write about, but am 'in the mood' and may ramble on indefinitely. But to return to our starting point. You would not blame me, either, if you could see how

almost impossibly busy I am from every morn to midnight, and working overtime without 'time and a half' pay, either—which is more than can be said of most modern laborers. The reason? That is what this letter is about and I cannot put off the inevitable much longer. Prepare your mind, then, for a mixed cargo.

You know my cowardly habit of always wanting to get the worst over and done with—or perhaps my 'child habit' of saving the frosting for the end—so I shall begin with the shadows and leave the sunshine for the bye and bye. And the shadows are heavy ones, Philip, I can't smile them away, no matter how hard I try.

Years ago, on the mountains, when dear old granddaddy was taken sick, Donald told me that nurses must learn the truth and face it bravely, and I am trying to do so, although it is hard, both to believe and to keep my courage up. For the truth is that Donald is practically a cripple and growing worse daily! I can hardly bear even to think of it—much less set it down like that, in cold black and white.

I let you know, months ago, that he was beginning to suffer off and on with muscular rheumatism and sciatica, brought on—I suppose—by the extremely damp climate of Northeastern France while his system was pulled down through long-continued overwork. At the start both of us tried to dismiss it, optimistically, as something of a merely temporary character. But now I realize that it is not. The doctors here—and, as you know, French physicians are very skillful in diagnosis and the use of prescriptive remedies even if they lack something of *my* doctor's skill in surgery—have been wholly unable to help him.

Of course he has his days of partial freedom from

pain, but during the past few weeks he has been confined either to his bed or a well-pillowed wheel-chair. You might know it would be *that*, for even when he cannot touch his feet to the floor he insists upon making his daily rounds. Fortunately—or *unfortunately*—the hospital is all on one floor.

It is too pathetic, Phil—that great, strong man who all his life has been so active and athletic, wheeling himself about like a disabled soldier. And so, indeed, he is. The children in the different wards have more than ever endeared themselves to me by the way in which they forget their own misery in trying to cheer him up, for they all adore him. One little angel, whose pain-filled visit to *this* world will soon end, got hold of a small piece of flannel and made a wound chevron which she insisted on basting upon his right sleeve, since when I have been kept busy removing and replacing it, for I could not let *her* see him with it missing. It is the little incidents like that, even more than the continued pity, which wring my heart the hardest.

Donald is patient—wonderfully so—, but he is a man, and when the pain has continued for a long period it sometimes bores a little well in his heart and the waters of bitterness flow for a time. Then I have to hold him close and work my hardest to ‘cheer him with a smile’. It is hard—no, I will not say that; but rather thank God that I am with him and can give him a tiny bit of consolation in repayment to all that he has done for me. If I *could* love him more I should do so now. I suppose that it’s the mother instinct which lies in the heart of every woman and is called into being when some one she loves dearly is helpless and in pain.

Of course I began, weeks ago, to plead for an early return to America, for I felt that we could now leave

without compunction—the French have practically taken over the hospital and are doing a wonder work here—but Donald, with the stubbornness of *your* kind, would not agree. He was going to be all right again in a day or two, and he has always spelt DUTY as I did then—in capital letters. But now he sees that it is the only course to pursue and we are leaving for home just as soon as it is possible. Every day brings rumors that an armistice is likely to be declared and if that blessed cessation of the fighting should occur our departure will follow speedily, unless . . . but I'm saving that for the end.

Oh, how I long, until the longing hurts, for the hour when I shall see home and all of you again.

And now for a surprise. We are not coming alone. I have, I think, from time to time mentioned the name of Camille Laporte—the orphaned Belgian child who has been my ever faithful helper since our arrival here. Both Donald and I have grown very, very fond of her and since she is utterly alone in the world I suggested that we take her to America as our little protégé. The child's gratitude—the silent kind which has no tongue and needs none for eloquence—was almost pitiful. We love each other dearly, but her affection for Donald whom she has, of course, known the longer, is more nearly akin to worship, especially since he exerted his really great influence with the officials and made my plan possible. She will be a very great help and comfort to me.

You will see her soon; but, as we are going 'to make her family'—as you used to say—I will try to give you just a hint of her history and characteristics, for at first glance she might seem like an odd little thing; nor is it strange that she is different from other children. (I keep referring to her as a child, from force

of habit. She really is nearly eighteen, and that is 'grown-up' over here).

Camille was the daughter of the Mayor of a small Belgian village in the Ypres sector, at school in a convent when the war began. The Sisters fled with their little charges before the Sadic hordes, but Camille—then barely thirteen—ran away from the others and, on foot, returned home to be with her father. Her courage was in vain, except perhaps to add the final blow in tempering his own. He sent her with other refugees across the border to France and safety, to stay on himself with the remnant of his flock and face the wolves. They shot him, on a trumped up pretext—shot him in cold blood for being true to his country and his king!

So, you see, the years which should be the happiest and most free from care in a young girl's life have, for Camille, been lived under the blackest shadow— orphaned, homeless, in a strange land and spent amid scenes of desolation and suffering. One might say that she has been robbed of the priceless gift of childhood, since she has worked constantly during the past four years, at first aiding other refugees, and later as a volunteer helper in this hospital. Is it strange that she is 'different'; or that she wholly lost her childhood faith and turned from God as a vain myth?

We have purposely kept her close to us—Don and I—, and he has continued her education while I have tried to lighten some of the shadows which filled her soul and—thanks to a few seeds of spiritual understanding which my dear 'Reverend' sowed in my own childish mind in the mountains—I think that I have succeeded a little. At least she has learned the great lesson of Service which is close to Christianity;

if it is not, indeed, the true touchstone of our religion. You believe that, don't you, Philip?

Yes, Camille is different from other girls; deeply serious, and sad; but her sadness is of the sweet, appealing kind and never morose. It is one of my dreams to bring her the delayed happiness of childhood, even yet.

I cannot describe her, other than to say that she is of rather less than medium height, and sturdily yet beautifully formed. As to her face, sometimes I think it the loveliest I ever saw; sometimes scarcely pretty at all, it is so serious. But her hair is a glory—like a black storm cloud—and her dark eyes are so large and wistfully deep that once seen they can never be forgotten. I am sure that you will like her. The sympathetic and artistic vein in you cannot but respond to her sad appeal.

Indeed, I have sometimes had another dream for her. She would make a perfect mate for some one whom I know and love; they are spiritually so much alike yet so different physically and as to mental characteristics. But I shall not tell him of my dream—matchmaking is dangerous business and I hope that I am not so unwise as a friend of mine was, in C. H. days. She had invited me to spend a 'night off' at her home and, as we entered the house, whispered, 'I hope that you will be your brightest to-night, dear, for there are going to be several guests and I have told them all about your fascinating smile.' Can you imagine it? I was never so glum in all my life and fairly hated that peculiar tendency of mine to look like a cheerful idiot.

There, my letter is only half done and I have stolen all the time I dare and a little more—like the old lady's recipe for making cranberry sauce. 'Put in

all the sugar that you can afford, then close your eyes and add a cupful.' I shall have to finish this to-morrow night. Whether you are being bored, or not, at least you cannot complain of its brevity. Good-night, dear."

Philip paused before picking up the next page and sat looking dreamily into the heart of the fire for a moment. His eyes held a tender light, partly called into existence by his love for his sister, partly by sympathy for the girl whom she had described. Then he smiled and shook his head, saying aloud, "Nothing doing, Rose. I have loved just one girl and shall never love another unless there's one in the world exactly like you—and that's impossible."

He stirred up the glowing embers, put on another log and, as soon as it had caught fire enough to re-illumine the letter, continued with his reading.

"Mid-night, November 2nd.

"Donald has been a little more comfortable to-day and is now sleeping like a baby—my big baby. I am writing by the light of one candle, with a comforter bundled about me, for the room is very chill and damp, so if my writing is illegible I have two perfectly good excuses. I sometimes wonder that I have kept so disgustingly well—my childhood on the mountain must have made me weather-proof.

But I have no time for lengthy introductions and there are two more topics to be touched upon briefly, as ministers say in preluding another hour of sermonizing.

Your last letter brought me mingled pleasure and disappointment. In a way I had always secretly hoped that Granddaddy's prophecy that that was a

'gold mine' of coal underneath my little mountain property might be fulfilled, for I could do so much good with the money, but we do not need it—of course Donald is well to do; rich beyond the dreams of avarice, I used to think. So I have forgotten my first disappointment upon hearing that the vein of precious coal, in prospecting for which father's life and mother's, too, were tragically sacrificed, does not extend to the eastern side of the mountain, in a very real relief. My mountain Eden will for a time longer remain unspoiled by the rude hand of commercialism.

Oh, if you could only know that primitive Paradise as *we* know it, Phil,—the impressive solitudes where man and his temporal troubles seem so insignificant, the tall trees and delicate ferns and flowers: nature so big, so strong; so primal and passionate at times! It may be true that America is becoming a nation of city dwellers, but I shall always think of it as more nearly typified by *my* mountains and France's older civilization as represented by this intensively cultivated land with its close-packed little stone villages, its formal canals and its historic cities and cathedrals. I love it, but sometimes—as to-night—my heart fairly cries out for my early home which I left so long ago, measured by experiences rather than years. I am sure that you would love it, too, despite the fact that you seem to be essentially a city product. I wonder if Camille would?—it is so different from anything that she has ever known!

Does my hint mean anything to you? I have a plan which I have not dared to disclose even to Donald, yet, and which I must discuss with you just as soon as we reach home for, if it is to be carried out, *your* aid is essential. Poor Donald!

And now for the bright thread which I promised

at the start of this book-length letter. It is, rather, a rainbow promise of sunshine to follow soon. You—as brother and doctor combined—can hear about it. Dear Philip, my most blessed dream is soon coming true. You know how I worship babies and I'm sure you can guess the rest.

Just think, the next time that you hear from me the words may not be written but spoken from within the circle of your arms.

With love—in which Donald no less sincerely, but with manlike reserve, joins me—I am

Most affectionately your sister,
ROSE."

CHAPTER III

CONSPIRACY AND A CONFESSION

THE "unless . . .," which ended that sentence in Rose's letter to Philip which prophesied a speedy homecoming, crystallized into a reality. Although the longed-for armistice was actually signed little more than a week later, it rather hindered than helped, for the crowds of casuals which immediately began to fill the ships westward-bound made it difficult for them to secure accommodations in advance. And then came a further enforced delay. The "rainbow of promise" touched the earth in far-off France and Rose and Donald found the fabled pot of gold at its end.

The descriptive phrase was, oddly enough, Donald's own, for the poetic instinct which lay buried within his deeply reserved nature was for a moment uncovered when Camille came into the little room where he was waiting, in almost unbearable agony of body and mind, and laid in his powerful, trembling arms his first-born child—a little daughter whose shapely head was neither bald nor covered with the usual dark fuzz, but bright with a silken down of purest gold. As she lay looking up, wide-eyed, at the strange earth creature to whom she owed her

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mortal life, the suggestion of a smile touched her baby lips. The *doctor* might have said that a wee, colicky pain caused it, but the *father* knew better. And "Smiles, junior" she was from that instant.

It was full two months before they could succeed in getting passage home, and even then a shadow marred the keenly anticipated arrival, after a rough and trying trip. For Philip was unable to greet them either at New York or in Boston, a medical convention in the middle west claiming him, and the home-like residence of Donald's sister, Ethel Thayer, on Beacon Street, seemed strangely empty, despite the loving presence of Ethel and her genial husband, little Muriel and baby Don, now a sturdy youngster of almost five. For father MacDonald was no longer one of the family circle, and the pain which news of his sudden death had caused, a year previous, was renewed and intensified.

The day after their arrival, as Rose was passing alone through the big hall, the front door was unceremoniously flung open and Philip sprang in, crying out the single word, "Smiles!" For a full moment brother and sister held each other close, without further speech, and Rose made known her overflowing happiness with laughter and tears intermingled.

Even when the man found words to utter they were not for her, as he demanded, eagerly, "Where's the cabled baby? I can't wait another minute to see Smiles, junior."

"Then look appropriately above you, for the queen herself descendeth," answered his sister, proudly.

He obeyed. On the upper landing of the broad stairway hesitated a girl who was a stranger to him, a young woman whose countenance appeared doubly pale in contrast with the lustrous black hair which crowned it, and her large dark eyes, now widening still more at the sight of Rose in the embrace of a stranger. But Philip's look was only momentarily for her, it was at once focussed upon the bundle of soft, woolly blankets that she bore and from an opening in which appeared the tip of a tiny nose. In three leaps he was up the stairs and, without so much as an "if you please," took the bundle from the bearer's uncertain arms, and cuddled his little niece close, despite her wails of protest.

"Well," laughed Rose, from the foot of the stairs, "now that you have greeted one of my children, suppose you do the same for the other—although not necessarily in the same manner, Philip. Before you stands our little Camille."

A sudden strange embarrassment took possession of him. Even after all that Rose had written concerning the girl she had seemed rather unreal, and he had quickly forgotten her existence. Now she was close beside him, and to his uncertainty as to how he should greet her was added a sense of disappointment. How could his sister have called either lovely or fascinating this sad-faced pallid, girl with her

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startling eyes? Of course he could not know that she was still filled with an inner shrinking produced by the multitude of strange and startling experiences which she had gone through during the fortnight, now blessedly passed. A new terror, too, had entered her heart. Instinct told her that this was Doctor Philip—the brother of whom her Smiles had spoken so often, and in such glowing terms. Camille caught her breath and shrank back a little.

Philip, who rather prided himself upon being a man of the world with unshaken poise, was thoroughly disgusted to find himself almost panic-stricken. His impression of her was distinctly unfavorable, but he must of course dissemble it. Furthermore, she probably did not understand English and he knew that his French was atrocious. But he must say something—Rose was expectantly waiting.

"Je suis charmant de faire votre connaissance, mademoiselle"—he stammered, and instantly realized that he had used the wrong verb form and declared that he was "charming" instead of "charmed." A quick flush covered his face and it deepened with Rose's peal of merry laughter. At that moment he found himself cordially detesting the girl whose lips remained so serious, but whose eyes seemed to smile, pityingly.

"Of course you are charming," cried his sister. "But it isn't considered good form to declare it so openly. Besides, a pretty French speech wasn't in the least necessary. Camille understands and speaks English perfectly."

"How do you do, Dr. Bentley?" inquired the girl in confirmation.

The joke on himself helped to overcome Philip's embarrassment and he held out his hand, exclaiming, "Well, that was one—no, *two*—on me. Honestly, I'm not always such a fool as that. I promise never to do it again—speak French, I mean."

"*Mais, oui*. Please do. I am sure that you speak it better than I English," Camille answered in her somewhat slow but correct phraseology.

Still she did not smile, and Philip thought, "Hopeless. Poor little kid, I guess I should be sorry for her." Aloud he said, "And now I must see the least important member of the family without further delay. Where's Don, and *how* is he?"

"In the study upstairs. Come along, he's dying to see you. Poor man, the trip was terribly hard on him and he's in rather bad shape." Turning to Camille Rose remarked, "The baby carriage is in the vestibule. Don't keep Junie out too long, dear. The March wind is pretty raw."

Lowering her voice she continued, "Phil, you must lend your influence to putting my plan across by appearing in the role of family physician. He talks of getting back into practice in spite of his handicap—office consultation, of course. But he mustn't even think of such a thing. Between us we've got to make him take absolutely essential rest, away from every distraction, and I have a perfect plan."

As they slowly mounted the remaining stairs she

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briefly outlined it in an undertone, and, although he nodded agreement, he could not help saying, somewhat rebelliously, "I suppose that it is the wisest thing to do, but—darn it all—I wanted to have you here with me. Still, his recovery comes first".

"Of course," she answered, simply, as she pushed open the door.

Philip stepped into the study, to pause momentarily. For his old chum, the powerful athlete of a decade before, was pitiaibly seated amid many cushions in a big chair—a helpless cripple! He seemed not to have heard their entrance, and was nervously drumming with his big capable fingers on the chair arm, while his head was turned away so that he might look out of the window at the bare and shivering trees. The old strength and crude attractiveness still remained in his face, in spite of the new lines graven about the corners of mouth and eyes by the invisible knife of pain. "If anything, though," thought Philip, "they add distinction, like the furrows in Lincoln's face, and so do the increasingly large patches of silvery hair over his temples, the poor devil."

Striding forward with extended hand, he called out the brotherly abuse, "Hello, you good-for-nothing, sham invalid."

Donald turned at the words, and a delightful smile momentarily wiped away every trace of physical distress and mental depression as his own powerful hand shot out to grasp that of the other.

For an hour or more the three mutual lovers chatted together, recounting the news of home and abroad. At length Philip said, "By the way, Don—and Rose, too, on second thoughts—I've recently become fairly well acquainted with a chap who wants to meet you both, *you* for your fame as a surgeon—which is all tommyrot, of course,—and *you* . . ." he turned to his sister and finished the sentence by saying, "Well, I'll let you guess."

"Because he has fallen desperately in love with the transcendent beauty of my photograph, of course," she laughed.

"There, now! Somebody must have told you!" He spoke in mock disgust, but she caught a somewhat startled look in his eyes and wondered at it. "Supposing I should agree that he had, at least, fallen in love with the smile hidden in your picture, what would you say *then*, young lady?"

"That I didn't believe you, or else that he must be a particularly callow, sentimental and utterly foolish youth," she answered, promptly.

"All right; in that case I'll merely think it, because I do not wish to be disbelieved and he is quite the antithesis of 'callow et als.' He's actually the most purposeful, reserved, somberest and lack-humorest man I ever met—a doctor finishing his education as interne at the city Hospital."

"Sounds highly interesting," remarked Donald, dryly.

"Doesn't it? But he is. I like him personally—

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attraction of opposites, I suppose—and enjoy studying him as a type. I'm not joking, though. He is a worshipper at your medical shrine, and wishes that an opportunity might be made for him to study certain classes of cranial operations under you."

"Flattered. Why don't you bring him here?"

"I will. And that reminds me. There's another who has asked me to perform a similar office in her behalf—for it's a *she* this time, and I'll wager you'd never guess who."

"Marion Treville?" suggested the other in a tone which made Rose glance up quickly. Did the old wound still rankle, after all?

"Well, I'll be hanged! What's got into you people to-day? Your guess was not right, but it was amazingly warm, Don. It is the younger sister of your one-time fiancée—*Margaret Treville*."

"*Peggy*? Why of course I should like to see her. The last time I *did*, she was a typical sweet, young college girl and I was decidedly fond of her. By all means ask her to call. What is she like now?"

"Still a 'sweet young thing'; pretty enough, but merely a society butterfly with sentimental ideas on social service and community work. Strictly between ourselves, she makes me horribly tired, but her childish chatter may amuse you. I'll pass along your invitation."

At that point in the conversation the baby, returning in Camille's arms, caused a diversion which ended in Philip's declaring that he simply must take his

departure in order to get the grime of travel from his person. As he arose he said, almost casually, "Well, old chap, I dislike the idea of giving you two up again, even for a little while, but you have been in the harness so long that you've certainly earned a real rest. And it's obvious that *you*, at least," he nodded towards Donald, "need it, literally speaking to 'put you on your feet again.' Boston's no place for you for a while and, since it has managed to do without you for four years, I guess that it can for a few months longer, under the circumstances. Therefore relegating to myself the office of family physician"

"Bah! Do you think that I require the services of a *baby* doctor, yet—or that I would have *you* under any conditions?" broke in Donald.

But the other continued calmly, ". . . . I order—I had intended to say, 'suggest'—a complete change for you in some quiet spot where there is good air, and plenty of it. I have it! Why don't you and Smiles make tracks for the Cumberlands where you can gather up a nice lot of loose ozone and make a new start from your old starting-together point? You may leave the baby with me."

"The idea!" cried Rose, as she held her little daughter close up under her neck, where she wiggled ecstatically. "Just the same, the idea isn't so bad in the main, even if it is yours, Phil." Her expressive eyes flashed him a message of mischievous appreciation. "Oh, Don, wouldn't it be wonderful?

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A few months' rest in the perfect peace of those high hills is exactly what you do need—don't you remember how you used to say that you came there periodically to draw a new supply of health from Mother Nature's never-failing breasts? And, oh, how I have been longing for a sight of my childhood's land and our honeymoon home. Yes, Philip's plan is perfect."

"Hmmm. I admit that it has certain sentimentally attractive features," began Donald. "But . . ."

"'But me no buts,'" Philip interrupted. "I told you that I was giving orders, not making a suggestion, and have I ever made a mistake in a prescription? No, never—or hardly ever. Well, I'll run in later; to dinner if I'm invited. Thanks. So long, all." His prescribed task performed he strode quickly from the room.

"Well, dear?" inquired Rose with a note of appeal in her voice, as soon as Camille had also departed, leaving the baby in its mother's arms.

"I won't pretend that I do not know what you mean. For your sake I heartily wish that we might carry out your conspiritous plan—oh, I saw the look which passed between you and Phil, my child—, although personally I'll come along just as fast here in Boston as I would in the mountains. All I need is a change, and this is a wonderful one, thank God."

"But . . ." began his wife, argumentatively.

"That's just it. Although Philip may dismiss

the matter airily, there really is a 'but,' and a big one. I can't afford to quit and lie down merely because I'm temporarily a bit crippled. There is a place, even for a legless man, and I've got to fill it."

"Of course, Don. I wouldn't suggest anything else—except that you are not going to be 'legless' long. But the sooner you fully recover the better work you'll be able to do, and a six months' vacation among the everlasting hills! Philip was right. We have earned it, both of us, and you do need it."

"Perhaps I really do," he answered, slowly. "And I wish we might both take it. But when the devil drives . . ."

Rose laughed. "Bless your dear heart, *nothing* drives, except your adorable, but temporarily foolish, mania for service. Have I got to turn your own guns on you and remind you of what you once wrote in a letter to little Rose, years ago—that nurses and doctors are soldiers and need their periods of rest in order to keep themselves fit for the everlasting battle against disease? Can you deny that you did write it, or that it's true?"

"No."

His response came with painful slowness, and he kept his eyes averted, while the expression which crept into them was one of such deep trouble that Rose felt a sudden clutch of fear at her heart. She knew him so intimately that every shadow upon his face carried a distinct message whose meaning she could more than half divine.

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"No," he repeated. "I can't deny it, but when I say that I must get to work immediately it isn't a matter of desire to serve so much as of plain dollars and cents, Rose."

"*Donald!* Why, I never knew you to regard money as a goal before. It isn't like you. Of course I know that we are not actually rich, by any means, but we've plenty."

"We haven't any—practically speaking, Rose," he answered in a low, distressed voice.

"Why, Don!" She tried to laugh. "How absurd. Of course you have given a good deal to different war charities—you know that I wanted you to do it, and am proud of you for doing it—, but surely . . ."

For a moment he did not respond to her implied question. Then he said, "I haven't played fair, Rose. I've been keeping something from you, with the half-hope that I might never have to tell you the truth."

"What is it, dear? Please tell me now," his wife spoke quietly. "Somehow I've felt for more than a year that you had some trouble on your mind which had nothing to do with your sickness, and the knowledge has hurt a little, although of course I could not ask you to tell me. But you're right; you haven't played quite fair—you haven't treated me as truly your helpmate. I want always to share your troubles, for don't you know that spiritual as well as physical burdens become lighter when they are divided?"

"Yes, I know. But . . . it was not altogether that I wanted to spare you pain, and of course I knew that the money itself meant no more to you than to me—at least not when we were *both* well and strong, and before Junie came. But my secret involved . . . another."

Again the painful little clutch at her heart.

"I . . . I told you at the time of father's death that his estate had dwindled to nothing . . . that he had lost his comfortable fortune in an unsuccessful war venture."

"I know. I was sorry on Ethel's account, not on my own. Truly I meant it, Don."

"Of course. But don't you see, now? When he wrote of his difficulties, I loaned him almost everything that I—that *we* had safely invested, in the hope—vain, as it proved—that it would pull him through. Father didn't simply *die*. The blow killed him."

"Oh, my dearest. Poor, poor father MacDonald!"

The sudden tears in his wife's eyes, and the tender caress of her arms about his neck were rather for the man who had gone than for him. Knowing it, Donald's heart went out to her the more and for a moment, full of silent and sympathetic understanding, he held her close.

"You did the right—the only—thing, dear heart. Surely you couldn't have thought that I would blame you!"

Rose's voice held a suggestion of reproach and he

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hastened to answer, "No. It was not that, but I didn't like to tell you, on his account."

"I understand. See, I forgive you your little sin of omission." Her pardon took the form of a lingering kiss. "I'm terribly sorry for father—what a shame that he had to endure that suffering at a time of life when the soul should be serene and gaining strength for its long journey! But for us it doesn't matter, a particle. We have each other and you are *going* to have your health again. I know it, somehow. Others need it, as well as you yourself, and what is right and we work and wish for hard enough, God will grant. You believe it, don't you, Don?"

He nodded, none too certainly. For a moment Rose looked at him with a troubled, wistful expression on her countenance. Then it brightened a little as she went on softly, "And truly there is just a little bit of happiness mixed with my sorrow. Can you guess why?"

He shook his head, wonderingly.

"We've been everything to each other and comrades in a great many different kinds of struggles, but we have never borne poverty together even for a little while."

"There's an old saying that when *it* comes in at the door love flies out at . . ."

Her hand pressed against his lips, checked the utterance of the conclusion and she cried, "How dare you even so much as repeat it? Come now,

play fair, and tell me just how little we really have. Not that it matters a single bit. Don't you see that now there is a double reason for your taking the time to get wholly well, before we begin the fight upward again? And where on earth could we live on so little as in my old home, which we must have kept for just this very event?"

"As to your first question, between two and three thousand dollars, and what is *that*, nowadays? Concerning your second, almost thou dost persuade me to be a Cumberlander, for a little while. Honestly, the peace and quiet of the hills does have an almost irresistible appeal to my spirit just now. It *might* turn the trick, after all."

"It would. It will!" she said confidently. "We'll go, Don; just as soon as we can make the arrangements. I'll write to Judd to-night and tell him to put our house in order for us. Once he promised to do anything which I asked, don't you remember?" she inquired teasingly.

"Oh, but he was your confessed lover, then."

"And do you mean to insinuate that he is not still, even if he does happen to be married? Aren't *you* both?" Her question required no verbal answer.

The raucous screech from the horn of a passing automobile broke the ensuing silence, and the man, whose nerves were badly on edge, shuddered slightly.

"The peace of the hills," he whispered.

CHAPTER IV

TWO OFFERS

It chanced that, only a few days after the MacDonalds' return home, Philip met Dr. Hunter crossing the Public Gardens and—suddenly remembering his promise—steered him down Beacon Street to the Thayers' residence to introduce him to Donald. Then he departed to keep a professional appointment, satisfied that he had done well, for Donald looked lonely; he had only Camille for company, and the strange Belgian girl still remained a negligible quantity in Philip's estimation, although, in order not to hurt his sister's feelings, he had early assumed a semi-paternal attitude towards the girl, and taught her to call him "Uncle Philip."

Back in the study, left alone by the silent withdrawal of Camille, the two men almost immediately found themselves mutually attracted in a quiet, reserved way. One was city bred, of as good lineage as any in the city where family counts so strongly, and for several years recognized as a leader in his profession; the other was of an origin which he rather studiously refrained from mentioning, the product of a struggle against poverty and—at thirty-six—still fighting doggedly onward towards the first goal

in a thorough medical education. Yet they had many mutual interests, besides possessing in common unusual physical strength and in that dynamic will which either violently repels or strongly attracts its like. In the case of the two physicians, it was the latter.

Almost without preface Dr. Hunter made a straightforward declaration of his purpose in seeking the interview upon having learned that Dr. MacDonald was his friend's brother-in-law. He tersely outlined his training and, after announcing his desire to specialize in surgery, added, "If you intend to resume your surgical practice—as soon as your temporary disability has passed, of course—there is nothing in the world that I would like so much to do as have an opportunity to join a clinic and study your methods, if it is possible. Of course I know that it is asking a great deal but . . . well, when I want a thing badly it is my nature to go after it without any palavering. I can't do any worse than fail."

Donald laughed. The blunt declaration both amused and mildly flattered him; but he felt constrained to tell his visitor that what the future held was problematical and, furthermore, that he was planning to spend the whole summer, at least, resting in the Cumberland mountains.

Just as he made this announcement Rose appeared in the study doorway, with Smiles junior in her arms, both clad in out-of-door apparel. The caller instantly

arose and his direct, piercing gaze was focused upon what he felt was the most appealing picture of radiant young motherhood that he had ever seen, for the woman's lovely face—now in the full bloom of early maturity—was all aglow from the buffetings of the March breezes, and her eyes sparkled with the light of perfect health and perfect love. Her happy smile changed to one a trifle more formal as she beheld the unknown visitor and, under his steady regard—which held a suggestion of frank admiration—the color in her cheeks deepened slightly.

Donald noticed both the look and the added flush. With mild amusement his memory harked back to Philip's assertion that Dr. Hunter had already fallen in love with his wife's pictured smile, and he found himself tolerantly thinking, "I don't blame him, if it *is* true. What red-blooded man would not?"

To his formal introduction he added the explanatory comment, "Dr. Hunter has just been telling me that he has an idea that he would like to become a co-laborer with us some day, Rose."

Donald never mentioned himself in the singular when speaking of his work. Rose was always included.

"That is not an absolutely accurate statement, Mrs. MacDonald," declared the other. "I am *sure* that I should, but, on the other hand, I don't aspire at present to a position other than that of humble student. In spite of my years I am still serving my novitiate."

Rose laughed blithely. "My, how aged you sound, Dr. Hunter. Yet I am sure that you are not as old as *my* doctor, and he is still young."

"Well, hardly," her husband broke in, and the note of veiled bitterness sounded in his deep voice.

There were counter denials and commonplace remarks passed for a few moments. Then Rose said, "I'll tell you something in confidence, Dr. Hunter. Donald wouldn't have mentioned the possibility of your studying with him if he hadn't already formed a favorable impression of you, and he isn't a man in the least given to hasty conclusions—or one who is often wrong in his estimate of people. Really, you should be quite flattered."

Their caller bowed, ever so slightly, but his expression did not change, and Rose's own smile faded. What a strange man he was!

"He has just told me that you are planning to spend the summer in a rather remote part of the Southern Highlands," he remarked. "I was almost on the point of warning you that you would find life pretty primitive down there, but I recall now having heard that you were raised in the Cumberland, Mrs. MacDonald."

"Yes. I was for fifteen years a child of the hills. I know and love them and the strange people who dwell within them, as well. And you? You seemed about to speak as one having authority."

"I grew up in Tennessee, and am fairly well acquainted with its mountaineers. The manner of life is

about the same there as in your section," Dr. Hunter replied.

"I suppose so. Like most mountain people I knew only the little section of *terrain*—you see I've been living in France—formed by my own private cluster of hills, but I know that the same conditions exist throughout the whole highland area of Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee varying only in degree of isolation from the outside world. Life is desperately primitive and hard there, isn't it? But its pathos has a strong appeal for me."

"I see. Well, since you know the facts, you can't be influenced by the romantic rot which some novelists write about it, according to what I hear—I never read fiction myself."

"Don't you? Oh, I do! They may overdraw the romance for the story's sake, but it exists. Why, the very idea that there can be a race of almost five million people enmeshed and lost among those inaccessible mountains, and there living the life of two hundred years ago *to-day*, is romantic," she cried and her husband joined in with, "I thought so when I first stumbled upon it. I doubt if one could go from Boston to any other place in the whole United States and find such a complete, unimaginable contrast."

"I reckon that's true." The Southerner spoke.

"It certainly *must* be," affirmed Rose and continued eagerly, "I long for that utter change for a while. Of course we are going back primarily to rest a little from our labors and to give the moun-

tains a chance to restore health to the doctor—they'll do it, won't they?" she interpolated and the visitor nodded seriously. "But I have also a pleasant dream of doing something to make life just a wee bit less hard for the small circle of my oldtime neighbors. When I was a girl and first became inspired, by Dr. MacDonald, with the idea that I might some day become a nurse especially trained to take care of babies I made a little vow that I would sometime return home and help the children of the hills. Now I can do it."

Her husband grinned and groaned. "I knew that there was a catch in it, somewhere, and have suspected what was coming. She's been talking about a second honeymoon—we spent our first one there—but what will happen is that she'll leave me alone, chairbound on the sidelines, while she works herself to death."

"Indeed, I shan't. I'll bring the little children to *you*, for healing." Rose's voice took on the particularly gentle tone which she always used in speaking of, or with, little ones, and her eyes glowed with loving light.

The moment of silence which followed was broken by Dr. Hunter's slow deliberate speech.

"I envy you. There's certainly tremendous need there—alike for medical aid and someone to teach the simplest fundamental rules of hygiene. We can't expect much from the mountaineer so long as trachoma, hook-worm and typhoid continue to

scourge them—as is bound to be the case while they live in their present manner. I . . . I happen to have had a dream somewhat similar to yours, Mrs. MacDonald. You see, I, too, know the need and . . . well, my tastes are still simple and the practice of medicine for money, merely, has no particular appeal to me.”

“Oh, do you really mean that you have thought of being a missionary of health in our mountains?” demanded Rose with eager approval in her tone.

He nodded and replied, “Perhaps . . . something like that, some day.”

“Good for you!” She had given the baby to her husband to hold while she removed her wraps, and now she clapped her hands together, delightedly.

“If only a lot more might know the crying need and hear the call, a splendid and enduring work could be done there. It seems both pitiful and criminal that a race of unmixed blood which is, next to the Indians, the most truly American, should perish as *they* are perishing with almost nobody caring enough to help them help themselves. It’s rather a coincidence that we two, I mean *three*, feeling the same about it, should have met like this, isn’t it?”

He nodded slowly, and then turned towards Donald who was, with typical abruptness, making the inquiry, “When does your present term as interne at the City Hospital end?”

“In July.”

“Hmmm. Of course I have only your own word

and Phil's excellent recommendation as to your qualifications and don't know a thing else about you, but I'm willing to take a chance and make this suggestion, which may give you an opportunity to practice what you preach. If I'm to be set to work again against my wishes . . ." he paused and smiled meaningly at his wife . . . "I'll need help to perform even one man's work. Why don't you plan to come down for a few weeks and see whether or not we can get along together? It will be a semi-vacation, and I grant you the right to leave just as I retain the right to 'fire at will.' Of course I'm not offering you a job—I couldn't anyway at present, for the war has left us as poor as the proverbial church mouse, but . . ."

"Oh, Donald. What a splendid suggestion!" broke in his wife. "If we three could only manage to clean up one little section we would have done something worthwhile for my beloved hills. If the race can be restored, physically, the rest will follow. Indeed, we might have a little school for the neighbors, too—that is, if the county one continues to be as spasmodic as it used in my schoolgirl days."

"Now you're letting your wonderful imagination gallop away with you," laughed Donald. "Rein up a bit, Rose! There are obstacles ahead. If you're planning a real medical and educational campaign, there is red tape galore to be cleared away. We couldn't practice regularly without being registered, and that state and Massachusetts haven't reciprocal relations."

"There, somebody is always taking the joy out of life!" quoted his wife with a little grimace.

"I might take the state examination, and you act merely in the capacity of advisor," came in Dr. Hunter's unemotional voice.

"Then the suggestion appeals to you?"

"I shan't attempt to tell you how much, sir. Once I was decidedly impulsive; but I deliberately set out to conquer impulse, and perhaps I've gone to the other extreme. I will say, 'though, that the proposal hardly yet seems like a reality—it's more like a dream. Are you quite sure that you mean it, Dr. MacDonald?"

There was a new light in the speaker's deepset eyes which utterly changed the expression of his somber face, and imparted to it a look of marked intensity.

"I should not have made the suggestion if I had not meant it," answered Donald. "It will give us an opportunity to become better acquainted and besides, I shall not be sorry to have a *whole* man around, to protect the womenfolk," he added significantly.

"Nonsense," laughed Rose. "The idea of our needing protection in my own mountains! I'm afraid that we can't offer you the hospitality of our roof, if you come, Doctor—you know what cabins are there—, but we own land enough for an army of tents, if you are willing to dwell in one."

"Indeed, yes. You say, '*if I come.*' I intend to,

Mrs. MacDonald. The opportunity is as welcome as it is unexpected. All I hope is that I may make good in it."

His gaze was once more fixed upon her face with such unwavering intensity that the suggestion of a flush again overspread it. Suddenly he turned to his host with outstretched hand, bowed ever so slightly to Rose and strode out of the room.

"Queer chap, but he has something more than ordinary in his nature. There's nothing halfway about him. He'll either go high, spiritually, or entirely to the devil."

"He made the same impression on me," responded Rose. "Once or twice I was almost afraid of him, but I think that I shall like him immensely. He is certainly strong, fearless and frank."

"Yes. His nature belies his name. There is nothing of the wary, cover-seeking hunter about him. He's a 'knock-down-and-drag-out' fighter."

"It seems like a deliberate act of Fate, his coming here as he did."

"Possibly. I wonder what Fate has up her sleeve in this instance?"

"Why should she have anything up her sleeve?" inquired Rose with a little laugh.

"Who's got what up her sleeve?"

Both turned toward the doorway from which the demand had come in an unfamiliar voice carrying a note both of propitiatory appeal and girlish eagerness. Standing in front of the trim, black and white

clad maid, on whose face was a look of protest, was a slender, graceful girl, whose street costume was a model of stylish perfection. From the upturned collar of a wonderful Russian Sable coat appeared a face as dainty and appealing as a spring flower, its pink and white complexion obviously alike the priceless gift of Nature, to start with, and kept unblemished by the art of the beauty specialist. Her lips were delicately shaped, her eyes were a sparkling cerulean blue and the chic turban, made of the same expensive fur as the coat, was jauntily perched on a crown of shimmering golden hair stylishly coiffeured to conceal forehead and ears.

Rose gave a little gasp of pleasure, but her quick and friendly smile faded like a ray of vanishing sunlight when Donald exclaimed, "Why, Peggy Treville!"

For his own part the man had been doubly startled. Not only was the charming apparition wholly unexpected, but it brought back a rush of flooding memories. Marion Treville had been more like a stately goddess; this girl was a modernized nymph, yet the resemblance between them was marked.

"I'm so glad to hear you speak in that tone," cried the newcomer. "I wouldn't let the maid announce me, because I was a little afraid . . ."

"Afraid of nothing! I'm delighted to see you. Come over here and shake hands with a crippled old man, and now with a woman whom I think you have not previously met, but of whom you have certainly heard. My wife, Rose—Margaret Treville."

"I am so happy to meet you, Mrs MacDonald. Of course I have heard a great many *wonderful* things about you, as Donald says, and as soon as I learned from your brother Philip that you had arrived I determined to call at once, in spite of the fact that he didn't seem awfully keen on bringing me, and of . . . of what happened three years ago." As she spoke the last words her pleasant, well-trained voice took on a suggestion of distress, which was either real or excellently simulated.

"Good Lord, why should *that* have kept you away?" demanded Donald, with a laugh. "The dead past has long since buried its dead, and besides, Marion really did me a far greater favor in throwing me over than she had done in accepting me. I have nothing but gratitude for her."

Rose thrilled at the frank declaration. Even though a woman may be utterly sure of her husband's love she is ever made happy by a new avowal of it. She thawed out entirely toward their impulsive caller and the banished smile returned, as Margaret went on,

"I was simply furious, and we have been rather bad friends ever since. Poor Marion, she got what was coming to her, I'm afraid," she added, lapsing into the careless language which has to-day made its unpleasant mark upon every stratum of society. "To tell the truth, I used to be secretly and desperately enamored of Donald myself, and drew some comfort from the thought that, although he regarded me merely as a *child*, he would have to love me a little

as his sister-in-law. Really, it was losing even that consolation prize that turned me from the vain pleasures of society to a real life-work."

As she chattered on, husband glanced at wife with frank amusement, remembering Philip's characterization of Margaret's "life work," and for some minutes he led her on to give an enthusiastic description of her numerous social service and community enterprises for which she had—she declared—been prepared by a postgraduate course at Wellesley, and to which she had unequivocally dedicated heart and soul.

"Oh, Mrs. MacDonald!" she exclaimed at last. "Philip tells me that you are going to your old home in the Cumberlands for a long vacation. Isn't that *romantic*? Do you know, I read every story I can find that deals with that utterly fascinating locality, and I've wished *for years* that I might go and do settlement work there. Surely there must be a wonderful opportunity for uplift and social education among those poor mountaineers. Do take me with you!"

"Bless your heart, dear!" replied Rose, amused by her youthful enthusiasm. "My mountaineers are much more romantic in books than in life. City-bred as you are, and with your home and social interests, you would never be able to endure the monotony and manifold unpleasantnesses of life there—you can't have an idea of what it would mean."

"Indeed, I have! Of course one has to make sacri-

fices for any Cause, and don't you think that I'm ready to make them? Truly I am; it's precisely what I want to do, for I have been trained to serve. Isn't there a chance for service in your mountains?"

"A thousand chances. But. . . well, we'll see. Perhaps I can invite you down there for a little while sometime, although now there wouldn't be even a place for you to lay your golden head. Our little cabin is far better than most—'grandpappy' modernized it with a window and an addition—but it has only two of the tiniest bedrooms imaginable, and we three, with Camille, whom you have not yet met, will fill them to overflowing."

"But then I could live in a tent. I used to often when I was at summer camps."

At this point the return of Philip abruptly changed the course of conversation and Margaret was obliged to depart soon after, with the final whispered appeal, "*Please* take me at my word, Mrs. MacDonald. I'm wild to do what I suggested."

"What does our society uplifter want to do, now? Reform the lowly mountaineer and introduce bathrooms and fingerbowls in the Cumberlands cabin?" laughed Philip.

"Don't be sarcastic, Phil," reprimanded his sister. "She has the enthusiasm of extreme youth, but I think that she's a dear, and as pretty as a picture."

"Pretty enough, in her way. So is a little brook, but they're both shallow and babble on forever. By the way, how did you like John Hunter?"

"Immensely," answered his brother-in-law. "And I like Margaret, too. She's more like a summer's breeze than a brook, and decidedly refreshing, although each is not very likely to blow steadily. But were there ever two people more utterly unlike than our two afternoon callers?"

CHAPTER V

THE HEART OF THE HILLS

A MONTH had passed by, filled with busy preparation which seemed to weary the man, who took no active part in it, more than the woman upon whose capable shoulders the work descended. Although the exquisite pain of the disease's first onslaught had passed, it had left Donald with a steady, gnawing ache, and his irritability had grown daily more difficult for him to conquer. At last the application of splints—suggested by Dr. Hunter, who had become a frequent visitor—enabled him to get about on crutches, and the start had been made.

And now the three days' journey from the busy, modern city to the heart of the nearly primeval hills was almost ended; and Rose was thankful.

The first day on the train southward to Washington had been a most trying one. Donald had been patient; but his self-control had required an effort made potent by the drawn expression about his tight-pressed lips, which had told her of his increased suffering more forcibly than any verbal complaint could have done. And *his* silence had been counterbalanced by Smiles, junior, who had rebelled with lusty lungs against the indignity of being thus whisked

afar from her wonderful new nursery and crib in a monster that made awful noises and perpetually jiggled one's little insides. *That* was, forsooth, no proper way to treat a lady who had resided upon earth but four months!

Matters had gone better on the second day, however, for, on the night trip westward, all save one of them had rested excellently. Camille had slept scarcely at all. The Belgian girl had never before passed a night on a train and she had found the experience of going to bed in a sleeping car, crowded alike with men and women, anything but agreeable. With trembling and in haste she had partially undressed behind the uncertain protection of a green curtain which her wild clutch had several times barely prevented from flying open in the middle when the male occupant of the berth above thrust it apart. Thereafter she had lain and listened, fearfully, to the night-magnified noises of their rush through the dark—the grinding of wheels on mountain curves, the ominous rumble over trestle bridges and the startling shriek of the whistle.

But Camille, too, had forgotten her trepidations as soon as she had arisen, to find herself, for the first time in her life, surrounded by frowning crags and wooded mountainsides. Rose had scarcely been able to persuade her to eat her breakfast, and throughout most of the day she had kept her enthralled gaze fixed upon the strange new scenery, supplied first by the picturesque Alleghenies and then the turbulent

waters of the Greenbriar and New Rivers, whose winding courses the tracks paralleled. Early, too, isolated mining camps had begun to appear and supply a new interest as the scene became less rugged, their stereotyped little houses looking as though they had all been cut by one pattern out of cardboard and painted by the same drab brush. Far above them, half-way up on the mountains' breasts, were spear-thrust wounds from which flowed forth the dark streams guided in long wooden chutes to the water's edge.

And, as the still-barren, winter-bound elevation had been left behind, spring had come on apace to meet them, ever bringing new verdure—the massed pink and white of peach blossoms near at hand, and on the hills the deep lilac of wild Redbud bushes bursting into bloom. The air had been both mild and invigorating and all the little party were in excellent spirits. “A happy home-coming, indeed!” Rose’s heart had cried.

But the third day, following a disagreeable night spent in a none too-clean, third-class hotel, had dawned with shield again reversed. Beneath lowering skies, which sent down fitful cold showers, they had embarked upon an antiquated branch-line train crowded to capacity with miners, whose unshaven faces and coal-blackened clothes, damply odoriferous, were not in the least picturesque at that close proximity.

Again they had ridden along a river-bank dotted

with mining settlements. But squalor had showed uppermost in them that morning, and the stream was an uninviting, bilious yellow from the spring-time mud which polluted its waters. Gone, too, were the interestingly rugged mountains. In their stead stood a never-ending jumble of precipitous foot hills, whose conical peaks were almost as symmetrical and uniform as the trees in a toy Noah's ark.

Before they had reached the final changing place—a rough mining junction—the rain had settled into a cold, steady drive, and they had boarded one of the two ramshackle coaches, which shuttled up and down the single-track spurline whose termination was Fayville, wet and with the spirits of all at a low ebb. To be sure, no complaints were uttered aloud, except by Junior; but Donald had once expressed his feeling inferentially, saying, "Wouldn't our enthusiastic social service worker adore *this!*"

And now the straggling little mountain-town—glorying in its title of "County Seat"—where they needs must exchange even the scant comfort offered by the dirty, drafty car for an open wagon, was in sight! Rose attempted to smile encouragement to the others; but it was obviously done with an effort, and went unrewarded. Camille's loyalty remained unshaken, but she was clearly a victim of disappointment; the baby was frankly tearful, and Donald in physical agony from the long-continued jolting which had not been materially lessened by the pillows provided for that purpose.

The train gave a series of more than customarily violent jerks and came to a stop. But, almost before its motion had fully ceased, the front doorway of their car held a tall, spare form, clad in dripping mackinaw, breeches and leather leggings, and with a water-soaked slouch hat sagging down over its strong, weather-beaten countenance. He was more mature, now, and less handsome in a sullen way than of yore, yet Rose and Donald at the same instant recognized the man who had once been her youthful lover and his own mortal enemy—now the staunch friend of both.

"Judd Amos—oh, *Juddy*, I'm so glad to see you again!" cried the woman. She almost ran down the aisle to meet his halting advance, and impulsively placed her gloved hand on his drenched shoulders. His long arms half-encircled her waist with an awkward movement, and his lip barely brushed her glowing cheek.

"Bully for you, Judd," shouted Donald, laughing. "A truly fraternal salutation, that. Now come on down here and shake hands with a hopeless cripple, you old rifle-toter. This is your chance to finish that 'wrestlin' match' we started some six years ago."

"Don't, Don!"

His wife's voice was full of sudden pain, but Judd merely grinned as he strode down to Donald's seat and held out his hand, real pleasure illuminating his somewhat morose countenance. A sudden perversity caused the doctor to put all of the strength of his

still-powerful fingers into the grasp, just as he had done on the occasion of their first meeting, and the mountaineer winced again.

Rubbing his outraged member he exclaimed, "Darn your hide—but I'm plumb glad to see you again and you seem tew be doin' pretty good fer a sick man. So this hyar's the only *little* Smiles! I've got you-all beat by two," he added as he turned and jabbed the baby's plump stomach with a soiled forefinger. She gurgled, seized it tenaciously and would have straightway conveyed it to her mouth if Camille—in whose arms she lay—had not hastily interposed and herself grasped Judd's hand.

"Keep right on shaking it, Camille," Donald commanded, much amused at the girl's expression of distress. "This is the little woman about whom Rose wrote you, Judd—Camille Laporte."

"Pleased to meet you. I don't guess she understands English 'though. One uv them furriners, haint she?" he asked.

"I, too, am very glad to know you, Mr. Amos," answered the girl, in her deliberate speech. Her face was serious, but her eyes laughed under their long lashes. The stranger might be rough, but the baby had set the stamp of approval upon him, therefore he must be all right.

Judd grinned again, a little sheepishly. "Thet's one on me. Hit's kind of a relief, 'though. I was skeered that you-all'd talk nothin' but thet furrin lingo. Do you hev tew wear them things, Don?

Tch, tch, that *is* too bad." His question was occasioned by the sight of the crutches which Rose was passing to her husband. "Well, I reckon thet the maounting air will fix you up right smart."

"That's just exactly what I've been telling him, Juddy," agreed Rose.

"Hmmm. Yes, this extra dry rain and the mud that you have here are very good for rheumatism and sciatica, I've heard." Donald gave a twisted smile, as a new dart of pain ran like a redhot needle from thigh to toes.

The other laughed, but his look held a rough sympathy as he said, "Reckon you're goin' tew say the same abaout my jolt wagon, fer hit's kinder shy on springs."

"Oh, Lord! I knew it was coming."

"Well, maybe hit won't be so bad. I've fixed a sort uv bed in the bottom uv hit, like Smiles wrote me tew, and what with all them pillers thar, you'll ride in style."

"Perhaps. Well, I can stand it, if you can stand my howls, and the sooner it's over the sooner it's done," he said stoically. "What do five or six miles of aches and pains amount to, anyway?"

"Reckon you're thinkin' uv the old foot-trail over the maounting, haint you, Don? The wagon road up Bear Creek's more'n ten—and hit's somethin' fierce to-day. I never seed worse holes in hit, and this hyar rain hes added an inch uv the cussedest slip and slide thet *ever* I seed."

"Good! That's great, Let's have a *regular* time while we're about it," but Rose broke in with, "if you don't stop I'm going to change your name from Judd to Job."

Curiously viewed by a group of loafers on the station platform, the party made a slow descent from the car and approached the waiting jolt-wagon with its ill-assorted team, a sturdy old horse and a tall, scrawny mule from whose flank the hair had all been chafed by the breeching.

"He haint much fer looks, but he kin pull wagon, horse and all aout uv a mudhole," remarked his owner, proudly.

At the frank stares from the roughly-clad and somber-eyed on-lookers Camille drew a little closer to Rose. She was not afraid, but the strangeness of it all made her instinctively crave the comfort which came from the mere touch of her protectress' arm against her own.

"Naow, you-all climb in first and then I'll help Don up," directed their guide.

Rose gracefully mounted the high-bodied vehicle by wheel-hub and whiffletree, and then Camille returned the baby to its mother's outstretched arms and assayed to do likewise. An instant later she found herself standing with both feet ankle-deep in a mud-puddle, and the interested on-lookers were laughing uproariously alike, at her mishap and startled exclamation. The hub had been slippery and the mule had decided that it was time to go home.

Shamed discomfiture and anger, intermingled, caused a furious flush to spread over her face, but before she could retrieve her blunder unaided—for Judd was grinning, too, and offered no help,—a young mountaineer had sprung from before a general store across the street and reached her side with half a dozen strides of his long legs, encased in clinging army breeches and woolen puttees.

Without pausing, he bent, held his large hand—palm upward—at the girl's feet and said, "Step there, Miss, and I'll have you up in a jiffy."

The command was so incisive that Camille obeyed it almost without being conscious of so doing. With one of her hands she was still grasping the wagon's side, and, as she felt herself being suddenly lifted into the air, she instinctively threw out her other arm and clutched the stranger about the neck. Another startled little "Oh!" was wrung from her, whereupon the delighted by-standers laughed anew and began to call out, "Good work, Virgie," "Haow'll you swap jobs?" "Virgie likes 'em fryin' size," and similar rude witticisms.

"*Cochons!*" the girl flashed out angrily, as she found herself safe at Rose's side. She quickly recovered herself and turned to thank her unknown knight—still speaking, however, in her mother-tongue as always in moments of sudden excitement. "*Je vous remercie, Monsieur. Que vous etes un bon chevalier!*"

"*Pas . . . pas . . . pas de tout, mademoiselle,*"



**"SHE INSTINCTIVELY THREW OUT HER OTHER ARM AND
CLUTCHED THE STRANGER ABOUT THE NECK"**

stammered the youth. Suddenly as red of face as she, he turned and fairly fled to his horse, which was tied to a post opposite. In an instant he had vaulted into the saddle and was off at a gallop down the street, pursued by more shouted jibes from the platform.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Donald. "Who was the noble youth who speaks something akin to French, Judd?"

"Him? Oh, thet's Virgil Gayheart. Lives up aour way," replied the other, shortly.

Another and the final lap of the hard journey was ending at last. It had been a teeth-clenched torture for Donald; a thing of bodily discomfort and nervous apprehension for the two women. The cold spring rain had poured down steadily, and steadily through it the horse and mule had plodded ever upward, over the road which was now a morass, now a stretch of rocks big and little, now merely the boulder-filled bed of the swollen creek.

Jolt, jounce, slip; slip, jolt and jounce, over and over again it had been, varied only by frequent abrupt drops of from one to two feet as the wheels on one side or the other had gone, hub deep, into holes and gullies. Sometimes it had seemed almost inevitable that the wagon would overturn, but they had come to learn that it was especially constructed for this sort of travel and that there was no real danger in a ninety degree tilt.

In time the man on his half-reclining bed, tenaciously holding to the side with a hand on which the sinews and veins stood out painfully, and the two women, seated on their ever-slipping suitcases, had become accustomed to this mode of travel and changed apprehension to stoicism; but their comfort had not been increased thereby.

Once, too, when they were riding on a precipitous hillside, almost overhanging the tumbling waters of the creek, the wagon had slewed and gone partly over the edge, whereupon Rose had screamed, "Judd, Judd! What shall we do? Donald can't jump."

"Sit tight," their driver had called back, turning to grin over his shoulder a moment later. "Thar warn't no danger. Only one wheel went over and the inside ones was in a rut. A wagon and pair uv mules *did* go daown thar last Fall, 'though. Stove the man up some and they hed to kill the animals. Haint *plumb* bad to-day."

Up and down they had gone, but ever reaching higher levels amid mountains whose ascent was steeper, with rocky formations cropping out among the trees more frequently. Isolated dwellings they had passed, as well; dreary-looking little cabins, which seemed to cower in their hollows as the rain beat down upon them. So, on and on, mile after weary mile, never moving faster than a slow walk, never stopping except to breathe the horse and mule or give them a chance to drink from the foaming creek in which they stood knee-deep.

More than once Rose had glanced first at the suffering man and then at the silent, white-faced girl, neither of whom uttered a word of complaint, although their raincoats had not prevented them from being drenched from feet to knees, and her conscience had smitten her. Was this, then, the bright land of promise, the country of which her memory had painted for them so fair a picture, selecting, it seemed, only the gayest colors? Distance indeed lends enchantment, and a spot may look very differently when viewed afar through the rose-tinted glasses of childhood and seen by disillusioned maturity as it is! Had she, after all, made a terrible mistake in bringing them there?

Now the five hour torture was nearly over; the last ascent, the last of the innumerable twists had been reached. As though in eleventh hour repentance the weather suddenly cleared; the rain ceased, the fast-descending sun burst in a perfect flood of golden glory from beneath the lifting bank of sullen storm-clouds. Raindrops, clinging to branch and rock and molding leaf sparkled prismatically everywhere—a magic transformation had taken place before their very eyes.

Their hearts responded. Tongues were loosed and Donald, despite his pain, ventured a jest and begged Judd to go right on up the mountainside to the old still and see if he couldn't manage to "worm" some corn-liquor out of it. Rose's smiling rebuke caused

him to continue contrarily and recount the story of the darky named Joshua who in answer to the Judge's facetious inquiry whether or not he was the man who made the sun stand still, replied, "No, sah, I'se the Joshuey that made the moonshine."

The cabin home of Smiles' happy childhood came into view. Pathetically small and primitive it looked, yet her heart leaped at the sight of it, and Donald's eyes for a moment lost their drawn look. As they climbed slowly towards it, each began to remind the other of memoried incidents which clustered thick about it. A Kentucky Cardinal—a "Joe Reese bird," Judd called it—flew from a dead stump, piping a welcome.

"But it is very sweet, your little 'ome, *Souris*," delightedly exclaimed Camille, using the French word for her benefactress' pet name. "I know that I shall love it."

"Judd!" cried Rose an instant later. "There's a new sign on that tree. Stop, I want to read it."

Their driver complied and the woman read aloud the words: "No Tresspassin. Anyone injuring this House or Land Will Answer to Judd Amos."

"Why, Judd, you dear man!" There was a suspicious little catch in her voice and her eyes were mistily luminous.

Judd seemed about to reply, but he merely expectorated over the wheel and said, "Ho-a. Git along, thar."

"I believe that . . . yes, somebody *is* in the

house!" she exclaimed again. "See, smoke is coming from the chimney—oh, how good a fire will feel and what a happy reunion we'll have before it to-night! Who is in there, Judd?"

"Moonshiners, I reckon," he answered, with a grin, but at that moment some one appeared in the doorway and waved wildly to them. The evening sunlight struck full upon the slender form and set to shimmering the tumult of golden hair which crowned the merry face of a young girl, half way up on whose forehead showed a narrow white scar shaped like a crescent moon.

"Oh, oh, oh! It's my little Lou—my *first* baby—grown into a big girl. My darling!" A girl herself in actions, Rose sprang to the ground and caught Judd's child-sister in her motherly embrace.

Weary as they were her prophecy was fulfilled, and they sat late into the evening before the friendly blaze on the broad hearth, talking over old times and telling of what later life had brought each in their wide-apart spheres. At length Judd arose, stretched himself and said, "We'll I reckon that we-all hed better be getting' along"

"No, no, not yet. Do stay," beseeched Rose, unconsciously falling back into the customary formula for mountain farewells.

"We kaint. You-all come daown with us. Better go daown."

Suddenly she laughed. "Isn't it delicious? Each

of us knows that the other can't comply with the invitation, yet we mean it, just the same. Folks here will mean it, Camille, if they ask you to 'stay the night' or 'stay a week'."

"Thet's so," supplemented Judd. "And I reckon thet Lou'll be wantin' you tew stay a week with us, right soon. Well, we've got to be gettin' along."

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF HUMPTY HITE

DURING the night which followed Donald came to feel that he could appreciate fully what the rack-tortured victims of the Inquisition had been obliged to bear. The jolting ride, the bed—hard and lumpy in spite of his wife's efforts to make it more endurable by padding the straw-filled mattress with two thick comforters—had doubled the grinding ache in his thigh. Time and again he bitterly cursed Fate and himself for coming thither, afar from every comfort, merely to humor Rose in her childish conviction that there, and nowhere else, would health be restored to him. And as often shame equally bitter had followed as he ever so gently reached out his hand and touched the sleeping woman at his side. To have her and her love was more than compensation!

Now dawn had come. He was more comfortable and, with the brightening day, his vagrant thoughts became correspondingly more cheerful. Rose and Camille were already astir in the other room, but he had been sternly forbidden to exchange the warm bed for his cushioned chair therein, until the night-chill should be banished from it by the blaze which they had already kindled in the big fireplace. The

door from the tiny bedroom was open, however, and he could watch the ruddy light flickering on the weathered spruce boards of the end wall and on the rafters of the slanting roof, long before the sun's level rays touched the top of the opposite mountain.

Smiles, junior—like all healthy and therefore good babies—had gone peacefully to sleep again after her morning meal, and she lay in the rude crib which Judd had made for her, close by his bedside, where he could, merely by raising his head a little, look down upon her rosebud face.

“‘God’s in His heaven; all’s well with the world’ after all,” he whispered, as he heard the woman and the girl singing at their work a little French refrain—Rose carrying the air, with Camille’s soft voice supplying an improvised contralto.

“Breakfast is almost ready, Donnie dear,” called Rose. “We’ve just the things that we used to have when you first stayed here over-night, in your little ‘loft room’—remember? I may be sentimentally silly, but I wanted to start life afresh, exactly as we did then. I’ll be in to help you dress in just a minute.”

“Don’t hurry,” the man answered in a cheerful voice. “I’m having a glorious time looking at the ‘pot of gold’ and the band of the same precious metal on the top of the mountain. Some morning I mean to get up before sunrise, climb up there, and get it. Then we’ll all be rich for ever n’ever.”

“We’re rich, *now*,” answered his wife, softly.

A moment of silence followed, broken only by the

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calls of a pair of Cardinals in the trees outside and the clatter of crockery dishes being set upon the bare board table. Then he added, "It's fried meat, corn bread and black coffee, I'll bet. Ummm, but they smell good; you can't hold me here much longer!"

As he ended his sentence there came the sound of a halting step on the little porch; a hesitating knock. He heard Rose go to the door and open it. "Judd," he thought, until he caught the note of surprise in her voice as she said, "Good-morning."

"Mornin,' ma'm. You're Mistress MacDonul', I reckon," responded an unfamiliar voice, and it immediately continued in the indistinct mountain drawl, which, when he had first heard it, had been almost as difficult for Donald to understand as a foreign language. "I was daown tew Judd Amos's store last night and he tol' me that you-all hed cum."

"And you're here, bright and early, to welcome us? That certainly is neighborly of you, Mr. . . . I'm afraid that I don't know your name."

"Hit's Stacy, ma'am, but folks mostly calls me 'Humpty Hite'."

"'Stacy'? Then I guess that you don't live here in Webb's gap. The Stacys . . ."

"I allaows you're right. We-all lives mostly up Beaten Creek way."

"Why, that must be six miles or more, if I can remember back six years!"

"Hit air, I reckon."

"And have you walked all that distance this morning?"

"No, ma'm, I rud my little ol' mule."

By this time curiosity had conquered Donald. He painfully swung his legs over the side of the bed, holding back a groan with clinched teeth, and began to dress.

The dialogue behind the scenes continued.

"I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Stacy. Do come in and have breakfast with us; it's almost ready."

"Thank ye, ma'm, but I hev et breakfast a'ready—two hours ago."

"Well, come in anyway. You must have something special to bring you here so early."

"I reckon I hev. Long time agone I war minded tew come es soon es you-all arruv, fer I knowd thet you war a-comin'."

"You did? How on earth . . ."

There was a new note of surprise in Rose's voice.

"The Lord tol' me, I reckon. Hit's this way, ma'm. When I gets me up in the mornin' the furst-est thing I allus does is tew go out tew the barn whar the mule and the cattle air, fer t'war in a place liken thet, the Lord He cum tew the earth. And thar He tol' me thet you-all war a-coming' some day fer tew help us-uns thet kaint help ourselves none."

Clumping along on his crutches, Donald reached the outer room and looked towards their early visitor over his wife's shoulder. He knew enough about the mountain people to realize that the man who stood in the sunlight, facing him, was probably of no more than what would be called "middle-age," but from

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his appearance he might have lived forever. His sparse gray hair, his wrinkled cheeks and sunken jaws—unshaven for several days—his watery, faded-blue eyes, bespoke wasting disease and wearisome toil; the frustration of manhood. His garments were apparently three; a ragged coat that hung dispiritedly over his bony frame, trousers still more frayed, patched and soiled, and a nondescript shirt, collarless and open at the neck. His feet were bare. To complete the picture the man's back was bowed almost double under the weight of heavy burdens borne, or rheumatism—or both. It pathetically explained the alliterative nick-name by which he had introduced himself. A pathetic figure their visitor indeed appeared, and might well have been repellent if his countenance had not been illuminated by an almost toothless smile of radiating friendliness.

Rose turned instantly at the sound of Donald's crutches on the uncovered floor and gave him her visible morning greeting, far brighter, he thought, than the sunlight on the hills.

"Have you heard, Don?" she asked, and he saw that her eyes were luminous with unshed tears.

"I most certainly *have* heard. Come in, friend and sit down. Of course you can eat again after a two hours' ride on mule back."

"I haint fit fer tew eat with you-all naow, I don't reckon, but I'll cum in and set fer a minute," was the answer.

The silent, fascinated Camille placed a chair before

the fire for the newcomer. He seated himself, bent far over, extended his twisted hands to the pleasant warmth, and calmly expectorated a stream of tobacco juice into the blaze.

Rose made a little grimace behind his back and Donald smiled.

"Hit's this-a-way, ma'm," their caller continued without further questioning. "I knowed thet you-all hed cum tew help take keer uv us in sickness, fer Judd told me thet your man war a doctor and you knowed how tew nuss folks. Thet air mighty fine, fer we-all don't dew right well much of the time. Myself, I tuck a fall yesterday. I war prizing up a log and hed turned hit over two or three times when the bar broke and I skun my hide right powerful. Look thar!"

He unconcernedly raised his coat, drew up his soiled shirt and displayed a badly bruised patch on his side.

"Oh, I'll get something to put on it," cried Rose, all the nurse again.

"Thank ye, ma'm, 'taint nowise necessary. Hit'll git well uv himself."

"Yes, I suppose that it will," the girl said, in an aside to Donald. "Almost anyone except a mountaineer would have had a bad case of septicemia by now, but they're auto-immune against most diseases."

He merely nodded, for Humpty Hite was speaking again.



"EXTENDED HIS TWISTED HANDS TO THE PLEASANT
WARMTH "

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"The docterin' air fine, but we-all needs more than thet. We hev need uv medicine fer our bodies, thet air a fact, what with the typhoid and pneumony fever, the red sore eyes and sechlike, but more than thet our minds needs doctorin'. I don't reckon thet we-all growed-ups kin git much help thet-a way, fer we air too plumb ignorant. Myself, I haint hed nary a bit of eddication and kaint read or write, ma'am; but hit's the children I air a-studyin' abaout. I wants fer them tew hev the chance that we haint never hed."

"Why, haven't you any school at Beaten?" inquired Rose.

"They hev what they *calls* a school-house, but thar haint scersely never no teacher thar and when one *air* hit's a p'or one. I haint a-blamin' the County, fer hit's hard tew git men tew cum and live the way us-uns live, especially when the folks haint a-goin' tew let their young-uns go to school skersely none. Yo' know how hit air in these hyar maountings, ma'am."

"Indeed I do, Mr. Stacy. I was brought up right here and I learned almost nothing until Dr. MacDonald came."

"I air aimin' tew ask ye tew call me 'Humpty Hite,' ma'am. Hit sounds more friendly-like, whatever. Yes, you lived hyar and you knows. Your man cum from the furrin parts beyond the hills, and he brung the light uv eddication intew your darkness hyar, and I reckon thet the Lord hes sent you back tew do the same fer us-uns."

He stopped. The woman's sympathetic distress was now obvious, and Camille's big brown eyes were kindling as with a vision which her mind beheld, but could not fully comprehend. Donald glanced from one to the other, wondering what the outcome would be.

"Why . . . why . . . I don't know what to tell you. You can be sure that I—that we—should like to help in any way that is possible while we are here, but a *school* . . . I don't know. We had thought of it, a little, but for here—in my own home, Hite."

"The need air greater thar, ma'am. The young-uns hyar kin get tew go tew the settlement school et Fayville—hit haint fur—and thar's mighty few cabins hyarbaouts, while we-all hev a right smart settlement in Beaten; fo'ty famblies, I reckon, strung along the creek. You-all cum thar and see. You'll stay; I knows thet you will, ma'am. Hit's fer thet thet I hev cum hyar this mornin'—so thet my Shade and Iry and Seephy and the rest of my young-uns kin hev a chance fer tew git an eddication, them and the rest thet lives in Beaten."

"Oh, Don, what can I say?"

Rose's cry of appeal went out to her husband. He shook his head. The problem was her's to solve or to pass.

"Oh, I should like to help you—help *all* my people, Hite; but . . . but I came here to find rest for myself; rest and pure mountain air for my husband.

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He is sick, you see. Of course I have intended to aid all I could by nursing the other sick ones here—especially the babies—but what you suggest is such a *big* thing . . .”

“Hit *air* a big thing, ma’am; but yo hev eddication and the love uv the maountings. You kin do hit, ef you will.”

Intuitively, Humpty Hite had made the most powerful appeal to Rose that was possible. He had challenged her will, her courage! As Donald watched her, for the moment utterly forgetful of his own bodily weakness and pain in trying to follow the working of her mind through her outward expressions, he saw the light of battle supersede the look of trouble in her eyes.

There was a moment’s silence, during which the eager light faded slowly again, as the woman thought of the multitude of almost insurmountable difficulties which blocked the path suggested by Humpty Hite.

Rather lamely she said, at length, “Oh, if I . . . if we only *could* make your dream come true, but I don’t know . . . I have my home here, a place to work from, and I’m afraid that there is no place for us in Beaten.”

“Not naow, thar haint, but thar *kin* be, fer I air aimin’ tew deed off tew you-all a right smart strip uv my own farm. Ef you’ll cum—and I don’t reckon that you air a-goin’ ter refuse, fer the Lord said you war a’cumin’—you kin build you a place thar. I

allows that you kin riz on my land a building fer tew live in and that you kin make the chillun tew hev weller bodies and eddicated minds, *too*. And perhaps, ef hit haint too late, learn me and my woman and the rest uv un on Beaten haow we-all kin live not liken the hogs but *un*liken'em. We haint tew blame fer livin' liken the hogs, Ma'am, fer we-all haint never hed no chance."

During the utterance of his simple statement the expression in Smiles' eyes had changed once more. Tears were trembling on her long lashes, and Donald had to swallow hard to remove the lump that had risen in his own throat. They both knew that Humpty had spoken the truth. The people who dwelt in Beaten, with the rest of the world shut out by high surrounding hills, even as the sunlight was at early morning and long before night fell in the outer world, had "never had no chance." The childlike sincerity of the appeal made refusal seem almost criminal.

Their visitor, for all his simplicity, knew what they were thinking and that the advantage lay with him. He got up slowly and stood, bowed and pitiable, typifying the people whose self-appointed emissary he was, making their plea alike through his twisted body and halting tongue, although he must have known that they would, almost to a soul, bitterly oppose the project which he advocated.

"I reckon thet I'll be gittin' along, naow. You-all cum and see fer yourselves; see the need thar; see ef I haint spoke the truth. You cum this evenin'," he said.

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"Yes, I'll come; I promise you that much," Rose replied.

"Sit down, Hite. Of course you'll stay to breakfast now," urged Donald. But the other answered, "I don't reckon I will, thank you, sir. I'd best be gittin' back home. Me and my boy Jep air clarin' a right smart piece uv maounting land fer tew plant intew corn this spring and hit's gittin' late, already."

"Oh, do stay," Rose begged and Camille hesitatingly added, "*Please* do, Mr. Hite."

"I kaint. You-all cum."

Without further adieux Humpty Hite put on his torn and shapeless hat and shuffled out.

"Well, what are you going to do about it'?" Donald demanded, when, through the open door, they had seen their strange visitor climb stiffly onto his "little ol' mule" and head up the creek.

"Keep my promise, this afternoon. For the rest . . . we'll see. But what a glorious opportunity for service it would be, Don!" Turning to the younger girl, she said, "There, Camille, now you know better what I meant when I tried to tell you what life is and means to the people among whom I was brought up. Could anything be more unlike your brave Belgium or *our* dear France?"

"I . . . I don't reckon that hit could," answered the girl with a whimsical imitation of their caller's voice, a smile in her eyes. "I suppose that means 'I guess that it couldn't,' doesn't it, *Souris*?"

"My, my! How quick our little English scholar is learning! No, it couldn't. As Hite said, we are a little nearer a town, with its school and railroad, and the light of civilization has penetrated this far just a tiny bit. But up where *he* lives! Wait and see, for I want you to ride up there with me this afternoon—'evenin', he called, for any time after dinner is evening, here in the mountains."

"I understood only part of what the poor man said, but it was very sad, I think. Did he . . . did he talk English? It was very hard to comprehend."

The other two laughed and Smiles replied, "Certainly it wasn't exactly like the English that you have learned—it is a *patois*; not really bad, but old-fashioned. You see, dear, these people's ancestors came in here a hundred—perhaps *two* hundred years ago. They started for the rich lands in the west which they had heard about, for they were pioneers—some of them the best and bravest blood of the early English settlers. And they got stuck here. Do you wonder? You know how hard it was for us to get in, yesterday; think how much harder it must have been to get *out* in the old days when there were no roads at all, nothing but this eternal jumble of hills, mile after mile and all covered with thick woods!

"Just imagine that you were one of those early settlers, with his wife and little children, lost in these hills and wearied-out with plodding on, day after day. Do you wonder that they just quit and sat down, at last? And do you wonder that they named

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their quitting places Troublesome, and Beaten creek and the like? *I* don't. They were actually defeated by Nature.

"Well, here their families have stayed, standing still while the busy world outside has gone forward—and philosophers tell us that standing still is going backwards. You'll see it all, this afternoon. But I didn't mean to deliver a lecture. What I started to say was that Humpty Hite and the rest speak English as almost everyone spoke it two hundred years ago, although they have become careless, of course. The French tongue has grown, little by little, from the Latin and Celtic, and the English from the language of the Angles and Saxons with thousands of Latin and Greek words added. But these people here come closer to talking the old Anglo-Saxon than any English-speaking men in the world to-day."

"Yes, I think that I understand, now, *Souris*. It is very interesting, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Very," grinned Donald. "But with all due respect to Rose's ability as historian and philological lecturer, I am at present more interested in the army motto, 'When do we eat?' "

"Oh, you poor man! When I get to thinking about my mountains, my head is in the clouds—as theirs are sometimes. Sit over here. No, Camille shall place the chair for you."

The three took their places, Donald in the big chair which Smiles' giant grandfather had made for himself and which was now deeply padded with cush-

ions, the two girls on the almost indestructible hand-made chairs on which Rose had sat as a child. With more boyish enthusiasm than he had displayed for many a long month, Donald played a tattoo upon his thick plate with knife and fork and hungrily demanded sustenance.

But his wife checked him with, "Stop, stop! If you wake up the baby I'll make you hold her, for I'm twice as hungry as you can possibly be. Besides, grace before meat. We're starting a new day—in every sense of the word. Let's start it right, Don.

"You haven't forgotten the little blessing that I taught you, years ago in France?" she added, addressing Camille.

The girl folded her hands and bowed her head. Very softly she began, "For all the blessings of this day, for rest and food, for work and play, we give Thee thanks, O God of light. Help us to live our lives aright. Help us to serve our fellow men, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

And Rose repeated, under her breath, the words " 'to serve our fellow men!' "

The ribs of pork, fried crispy brown, the corn bread, rich golden-crust, and the strong black coffee held their attention for a time and conversation was in monosyllables. At last Donald looked up and said, abruptly, "What do you really think?"

His wife understood and answered slowly, "I haven't really thought, yet. But I couldn't help being stirred. Could you?"

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"No. It was . . . well, it was out of the ordinary. He's a character, despite his soiled hide—as he called it . . ."

"'E was white, clean white inside,' " quoted Rose, and Donald retorted in a pretended huff, "You took the words right out of my mouth."

"We both know that he told the truth. Their need *is* crying; but is it for us to fill it?"

"The call came to you."

"*Donald!* I'm beginning to believe . . . Oh, my dear, if I thought that you wanted to try that wonderful work, even for a little while, nothing could stop me from attempting it. Anyway, we'll go and see. Judd will take us all in the jolt wagon and . . ."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the man with a very real shudder. "No, I'll play nurse, and you two go. Judd can supply you with riding horses or—better still—mules, and I'll see the picture later on, through your sharp eyes."

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER VII

BEATEN CREEK

"WELL?"

Donald spoke impatiently, and almost before his wife and Camille had got inside the door, to which they had run between the drops of a hasty spring shower, leaving Judd to lead off the two mules.

"Very well, indeed. And all the better for seeing you and Junie again," replied Rose as she tossed her sweater aside, kissed him and caught up the baby. The smile upon her lips and the lightness of her words were not reflected in her heart, however. Donald's irritability was increasing, daily.

"Thanks." The man got a new grip on his nerves and continued more pleasantly. "But I'm like a small boy waiting for a promised story. Judd's been in and helped me pass the time, but the last hour has been an age and I can't restrain my curiosity a minute longer."

"Self-restraint is good for the soul, my little lad. Contain it you must, 'til supper is ready—I'm famishing again."

With her little daughter still held in one arm, and a snatch of song on her lips, Rose set about preparing the evening meal, assisted by Camille, and Don-

ald—acting the sulky child with only part pretense—inched his chair around until he was back to the workers and facing the sunset picture framed by the hand-hewn door-casing. The Master Artist had laid the first wash of light spring green over the red-brown of the opposite mountainside and here and there added brilliant splashes of color—the massed white of the dogwood's luxuriant blooms, the Red-buds' rich lavender—and was tinting it all anew with the diffused golden glow of eventide. Through a wooded vista far below came the silver gleam of the Swift River's turbulent waters—waters which had made an orphan of the baby Rose and given her to the mountains. There was a dart of added color as a red-winged blackbird sped past, flying low to its nesting mate and then another as a tiny Tom Tit, speckled with yellow, followed. From the creek sounded the tuning up of the frog orchestra; from the forest the intermittent roll of the wood pecker's snare drum, while from beneath the sagging floor of the little porch came, too, the first inquisitive chirps of a friendly cricket.

Save for these voices of nature a soothing silence brooded over the land without, and the little home resounded with a cheery domestic bustle. Peace entered the man's troubled soul and he was ready with a friendly grin when Camille brought him a basin filled with soapy hot water.

"Smiles says that you are to 'wash the mad off'," she explained.

The three took their places at the plain board table and—still pretending to act the part of a spoiled child—Donald began once more to tease for the story. Crippled and pain-filled as he was, he had already begun, at moments like these, to give evidence of relaxation from the high tension under which he had labored with scarcely a break for four years; but they were of brief duration—mere oases in the arid desert of bodily suffering and the depression which it produced.

For a little longer Rose let him beg, delighting in his more cheerful mood and teasing him affectionately. Then she said, "No, I shall not tell you about our adventure. But Camille *shall*. I want to hear her impressions, told in her own words."

"No, no, *Souris*! I cannot tell them. It was all so new, so strange, that I have not the English words to say it," protested the girl, earnestly.

"Indeed you have. Come, begin. I promise to help you over the rough places."

"As you did upon the road? Oh, it was more unpleasant than the one over which we passed yesterday, Donald; so full of big holes and so deep with mud that it made me to think of the battlefields again—and I was sad. Twice I did not quite fall off the mule; I had never ridden one before. But Rose helped me. They were very careful, the two patient mules, especially when they stepped down into the deep holes or among the rocks of the creek but once my mule slipped, and once he jumped to one side

when a great, black snake, that was lying on a rock in the sun, went ssss at us. There were many snakes thus. Ugh, but I do not love them!"

Donald glanced inquiringly at his wife, who replied, "Merely harmless water snakes. I think that I saw a dry land moccasin—at least it was just the color of the dust,—but it slithered away before I could make sure."

The girl was now quite ready to talk. In the recollection of her novel experiences all her reticence had vanished and a light bred of excitement had been born in the depths of her big brown eyes. Animation had heightened the color in her cheeks, too, and Rose smiled meaningly at her husband. This was one of the rare moments when Camille was undeniably beautiful.

"It was perhaps ten *kilometres* that we rode . . ." she had not yet learned to think in English miles . . . "and all the while it seemed to me that the mountains grew steeper—*n'est-ce pas, Souris?* We met no one, for which I was glad, for I ride not well, but, it was so very beautiful and so wild!

"At last we came to the houses again, but they were not placed near together, as at home, nor were there many of them. And now, high, high up on the sides of the steep hills were places where the trees had all been cut down and tiny men and women, too, were working." She interrupted her description to demand, "But why do they not terrace the mountain-side, as we do? Does not the earth slide down, then?"

"It certainly does," answered Donald, "in a very few years after the forests have been cleared and the retaining roots removed, but the mountaineers haven't yet learned the need of conservation. Land is still about the most plentiful thing that they have—with the exception of *time*, which, according to their way of thinking, apparently, was primarily created for loafing purposes."

"Donald, that's unjust!" rebuked Rose, and he grinned again.

"*Alors*, we came to the houses," Camille continued. "They are very funny—so little and so . . . so *primitif*. They are what we, in French, would call '*cabanes*'."

"And in English, too. Little cabins," interpolated the other.

"Sometimes they were built of board, like this one, but more times of big, big . . ."

She hesitated, illustrating with her shapely hands.

Rose came to her rescue with the word, "Logs," and went on, "You couldn't possibly find a better example of old-time construction than Humpty Hite's cabin represents, Don. I asked him about it and he said that it cost in money just a little over two dollars—the price of the few nails used to put on the handnade shingles. The logs are notched and fitted together, and wooden pegs used everywhere else. Excuse me for interrupting, dear."

"Yes, it is like that; and the openings between the . . . the logs are filled up with gray mud made

hard by the sun and sometimes, where the mud has fallen out, leaving holes, the people have put in old rags. Oh, it was all so different from our little stone villages, except for one thing; there were a great many cows and chickens and big mother pigs with their little pink . . . pink piglets, running everywhere. And then there were many, many poor little children, who ran into their cabins as we passed; 'though why should they have been afraid? These, too, made me sad, for they made me to think of *nos enfants réfugiés*—so thin they were, with almost no clothes at all, Donald.

"*Alors*, as we arrived the strange and bent old man came to meet us and with him a pleasant little boy who smiled; but his eyes went . . . *comme ça!*" She made an acute angle with her two forefingers. "They had been making a new field far up on the mountain—we could hear a big tree come crashing and sliding down as we rode up—sometimes running, sometimes slipping, they came and took us into their 'ome."

The girl's eyes grew larger still as she viewed again the scene which had been vividly imprinted upon her memory. She drew up her shoulders with a little shudder and—for a few words—lapsed into her mother tongue for the fuller expression of her feelings.

"*Mon dieu, c'est terrible-ça! Quel dommage! Mais il fait sale!* Oh, it was so dark, so dirty, Don. So . . . how shall I say it? There is but one small

room, no bigger than this; of floor there is none except the hard dirt; and it has but the one door and of windows not at all. *Voilà*, here is a fireplace where they cook as in the olden days, and there two broad wooden beds, with mattresses so rough . . .”

Rose broke in a third time with the explanatory words, “Filled with straw and corn husks. *You know.*”

“You bet I do—corn husks, straw and . . . a multitude of other things. Ugh!”

“Yes, it is so. And over them only a few, oh, so dirty and rumpled coverings—‘kiverlids’, the *Madame* called them. And it is there that sleep the whole family; the mama and papa and eight children. I could scarcely stay in the room! So dirty it was that I wished to run quickly to the creek for buckets of water to clean it, *so!*” She went through a brief pantomime of splashing walls and floor vigorously, whereupon Donald laughed and lifted his sound leg out of the imaginary flood.

“And the poor little ones who clung to their mother’s skirt! So pale and thin they are, with eyes so red and weak!”

“Trachoma, of course,” exclaimed the doctor.

“Half-blind with it, every one of them—poor kiddies,” Rose answered. “I could not help wish—that our Dr. Hunter had been along to treat them immediately—I wanted to, but I succeeded in keeping my distance.” She smiled tenderly down into the cradle by her side, out of which her own baby’s eyes

"Such a *maison miserable* it is! But the 'umpty man and his wife were very kind. She wished us to eat of the corn bread which she had been baking in the ashes, but we were not 'ungry," Camille continued, and Donald laughed, "I should 'ope not!" When the girl became excited she always had difficulty with the aspirated "h."

"Oh, I must tell you of this. It was while we were talking that I heard the sound of a rifle, *bang, bang, bang!* For just a moment my heart was here . . ." Camille expressively clasped her throat with both hands. " . . . for it made me to think of the war again. But this time it was not the Boche. No, it was a woman who lives on the side of the other hill. We ran to the door and saw her. Very old she looked, and her stringy white hair and not-so-white feet were bare. She was shooting down at the ground beneath the . . . the . . . What do you call them? Hoofs? . . . the hoofs of a little mule on which rode a very ragged boy. The mule jumped, *so*, and the boy nearly fell from it, but not quite, for he seized it with both arms about the neck and held tight as it ran away, while the old woman laughed, 'ha, ha, ha'."

"For heaven's sake," began Donald. "What . . . ?"

"It was only Aunt Lissy Triplett—the local witch and 'yarb' doctor—amusing herself," explained Rose. "She's a character for you, Don. I had entirely forgotten about her, but when Humpty took us over later and introduced us I remembered that

grandpap once took me over to Beaten behind him on our old horse to see her and have her tell my fortune, when I was a little girl. When it all came back to me—you know how memory is sometimes awakened by the sight of a place seen before—I was almost frightened, for, in telling my fortune, she had come so close to what has actually occurred in my life—the going to a big city, marrying a ‘great’ man and crossing the water to another ‘island.’ To these mountain people every country is an island, Camille—even America. Oddly enough, she remembered and placed me at once. Philip would be wild over Aunt Lissy.”

“But what was the bombardment for, I should like to know?” demanded her husband.

“Mere deviltry, or her idea of a joke. It seems that the boy is her sister Phroneys son, Noey—Noah, I mean—and Hite said that the two women hate each other like ‘p’ison’ and that Lissy shoots under Noey’s feet almost every time he passes her cabin. Nobody thinks anything about it, for she is a crack shot, despite her sex and years.”

“Well, my child, you’ve certainly had some novel experiences this afternoon. ‘But what good came of it at last, quoth little Peterkin?’ ”

“Smiles, *please* you tell him. I cannot; it is so difficult,” cried the girl.

“Very well, I’ll take up the story now, if you wish. But you’ve done wonderfully. Hasn’t she, Donald?”

“Indeed, yes. A well-told tale and a charming

teller. By way of reward you may hold the baby for a while. I see that she's beginning to fret and her mother will need her hands in order to talk—you *will*, Rose. You've become about as 'Frenchy' as Camille."

"Hite is a natural born general and he has a fine sense of the dramatic, despite his lack of 'book-larnin'," began Smiles. "He led us immediately to what purports to be the county school house. It is simply a cabin, so far gone in senility that it has become uninhabitable as a dwelling—and you can draw your own conclusions as to what a state it must be in. Poles, stuck up every-which-way, support the sagging roof; the floor is of dirt—and dirty; there is no glass in the windows, because—as the walrus might have remarked to the carpenter—there are no windows. The desks are rough benches; the chairs, tree-trunks.

"Just as we reached the door a pig came squealing and scurrying out, pursued by a primer thrown with more force than accuracy, and our entrance was greeted by the exclamation, 'Thar hit comes again. Git hit aout!' uttered by a cadaverous-appearing youth seated at the teacher's desk. It *was* the teacher; and it seems that he's so nearly blind, from trachoma, that he can't see beyond the first row of children. By way of apology he explained that many of the pupils came from a distance too great to permit of their returning home for lunch, and they bring cans of milk with them, which they

leave standing against the back wall. The neighborhood pigs—canny brutes—have discovered this fact, and raid the place at every opportunity to tip the pails over and lap up the luscious lacteal fluid.”

She paused for breath and Donald cried, “Now, Rose! I know that you want to make a good story—and I like to hear one; but please remember that my university’s motto is ‘Veritas,’ and have a *little* regard for . . . ”

“But it *is* the truth—whole and nothing but. Isn’t it, Camille?”

The girl nodded in confirmation and Donald roared.

“Imagine the immaculate Margaret teaching ethics in a setting like that!”

“I asked the nineteen-year teacher, Joel Fugate, why they didn’t have a fence about the place to keep them out and ‘he allowed’ that there had been one there, last fall, but that it had all been burned for fuel during the winter months,” added Rose.

“Of course. It’s ever so much easier to run out and get a piling to break up than to provide a real supply of wood. Anything more condemnatory?”

“Yes, your honor. And having dramatic instincts myself, I’ve saved the most incredible for the climax. Remember that heavy black cloud and hasty shower which came up about three o’clock? Well, we were in the schoolhouse at the time and . . . ”

“And it leaked,” suggested Donald, innocently.

“It did, smarty. The water came through the roof

in buckets' full, but that isn't what I was about to say. Joel promptly closed the session and drove his little flock *out doors*."

"So that they could all get a good bath, probably."

"Don, you're incorrigible to-night!" cried his wife and added under her breath, "Thank God." Aloud, she went on, "No, it was to keep them from getting drowned! The building is below the level of the creek at highwater mark and, although it is early for cloudbursts, he was taking no chances of having any little tot whom he couldn't see in the darkness hide in there and get caught. You know how quickly a cloudburst brings a 'high tide,' as they call it, in these creeks."

"Verdict for the plaintiff. When do we start Humpty's new school?"

"Don't joke, dear. This is an awfully serious matter and I want to discuss it seriously with you."

"Pshaw! You know that your mind is already made up to move over to Beaten and make Hite's prophecy come true. And you likewise know that if your arguments should fail to convince me of the wisdom of your plan you can wheedle me into agreeing,—now don't you?"

"Donald MacDonald!" Rose went around the table and seated herself upon the broad arm of his chair, from which vantage point she first pulled the silvery lock over one temple and then kissed it. "I believe that you really *want* to do it," she exclaimed.

"*I?* Want to? What has a helpless cripple like myself to do with it?"

"As though it could be done without your whole-souled aid and abetting! Oh, I don't mean with money—it wouldn't cost us much, at least not to start with—but in every way. And it would help to take up your mind."

"Hmmm; maybe. We're going pretty fast. That which *is* is pretty bad, apparently, but what have you and your friend Humpty Hite to offer, remedially?"

"He, something concrete; a strip of his impoverished but still picturesque acres. Oh, I wish that you might have seen it with us. You don't have much to say about the beautiful, but I know you love it. And how you would love that spot—it's even prettier than here!"

"Heresy!"

"No, 'honesty.' There's a little hollow in the mountain's side—just the spot for a home to nestle in. And above it, from a frowning rocky fortress, which crowns the summit as though placed there especially to watch over and protect the valley, a forest army comes marching down between two man-made clearings, in solid phalanxes. You know how conglomerate the growth is in these mountains, and there are regiments of chestnut, walnut and ash, with tall pine and poplar officers; companies of birch and buck-eye, in charge of silver maple captains and 'sugar tree' lieutenants . . ."

"With sourwood bushes for second looeys," grinned Donald.

"Stop making fun, or I'll have my army fall upon

you and crush you. Now I'm going to finish my fanciful description just out of spite. There are squads of elms, red and white . . ."

"With mascot *dogwoods* running about everywhere! I suppose that in a minute you'll be telling me that they are all 'leaving' because there has been a 'forward March'." He ducked to avoid her threatened assault and she cried, "of all atrocious puns! I had intended to tell you about the wonderful commanding Sycamore in his silvery-white coat and brown trousers in front of them and just where our new home is going to be. . . ."

"There, you see!" he interrupted again, but she ignored him and continued " . . . but I won't, now. Oh, yes. And there's a little courier brooklet leaping down the hillside to mingle its crystal-clear waters with the muddy creek."

"Very poor taste, *I* should call it," exclaimed Donald. "Apparently 'every prospect pleases and only man is vile'."

"The last part of the quotation isn't true but the first is. Oh, Philip will adore the spot when he comes to spend his promised vacation with us."

"And how about Hunter, if he comes to work, as *he* promised?"

"He'll love it, too. There may not be a particle of the artistic in his make-up, but the ruggedness of the mountains will appeal to him. Somehow he seems like them—rugged and stern, but kindly at heart."

"*Are they?*"

"Of course. They make the climate equitable, their air is pure and health-giving, their slopes supply timber, their mines coal and . . ."

"Their rocky fastnesses produce moonshine 'that maketh glad the heart of man'. Your point is proven. And now what have *you* to offer?"

"Just a hope—the hope of building a new little home there, and a little school-hospital, founded on faith and charity; one which will be like a new heart for these hills, sending out health streams to revivify a failing race, and a new mind giving light to those who now dwell in the shadow."

"The young shall see visions," said her husband, inwardly stirred, yet smiling at her eagerness. And she retorted, "Well, if you *will* insist upon considering yourself a Methuselah, remember that Joel added, 'and the old men shall dream dreams'. Come, please join me in my dream of a new little city set upon a hill—where it cannot be hid and shall be like a candle in a candlestick giving light to those that be in darkness."

"The idea is attractive, although the metaphor is slightly mixed. But don't let your enthusiasm make you lose sight of the fact that grafting a new heart onto a diseased body is a delicate surgical operation, to say the least."

"It can't be done."

Judd uttered the chilling words from the doorway.

CHAPTER VIII

VIRGIL

"It can!" retorted Rose with spirit.

"Hello, Judd. So you've overheard the dreamer's dream?" Donald inquired, as the tall mountaineer slouched into the room, hands in pockets.

"Some uv hit. Been listenin' aout on the porch fer a couple uv minutes."

"Eavesdropper!"

At the mock scorn in the woman's voice Judd grinned, tolerantly, replying, "Well, the door was open. Anyhow, I knowed hit, hours ago."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Donald.

"I reckon. Soon as Humpty Hite told me what he'd cum up hyar fer this mornin', and she borrowed my mule tew ride up *thar*, this evenin', I knowed thet she was a gonner." He paused; then added the apparently irrelevant remark, "I set a price on my store this evenin'—Ira Combs hes been pesterin' me tew, fer quite a while back."

"You did? Why, Juddy? I thought that you were doing a very profitable business," said Rose.

"Business haint too bad. But you-all air goin' tew need someone tew look after you up *thar*—

somebody that can hop around right smart, which Don haint a-doin' *at* present."

The doctor winced, but managed to smile wryly, while his wife cried, "Judd Amos! You don't mean to say that if we move, you . . .?"

"Reckon I dew. Me and Mandy hev talked hit over and when Lou allaowed thet ef you went *she* would, thet settled hit. Whar she goes *I* goes."

"But what on earth would you do, up on Beaten?" Rose was both deeply touched and distressed by his disclosure. Stubborn he might be, and crude, but he still had the fidelity of a watchdog for her.

"Haint decided. May start another store—thar's none over on thet creek. I'm tellin' you,' though, thet ef you *do* go you'll be makin' one great big mistake—thar's no question about hit. Hit's wastin' both time and money, tryin' tew help that Beaten Creek bunch. Better stay hyar. *We* haint plum energetic aourselves; but *they're* dead and buried—shiftless, lazy and bad actors, who are satisfied tew stay in Beaten and *stay* beaten. They don't want tew be helped, particularly not by no 'furriners'—I'm tellin' you. Why, they druv the last missionary thet tried hit off'n the folk with rifles. Reckon he's headed North and runnin' yet." The speaker grinned in recollection.

"Humpty Hite isn't like that. He may have been pushed pretty far down by circumstances, but he is reaching out for hands to help him and his children up," insisted Rose.

"*Maybe*. My idea is that he's lookin fer something soft—like a hog fer a mudhole. P'raps I'm wrong abaout *him*, but the rest'll kick like fiesty mules, ef you try tew drive 'em."

"So did you, once, when Donald and I wanted to help you against your will. You were glad enough afterwards," she flashed.

Their visitor fell silent for a moment and into his thin, hard face crept an expression which bespoke painful memories.

"I'm sorry I mentioned that, Juddy," repented Rose, laying her hand gently on one of his gnarled ones for an instant.

Donald coughed. "Have a cigar, old man?" he asked.

"Thanks, but I quit smokin' a while back. Started tew chew a little jest tew ease myself off—and haint stopped yet," he added, with a shame-faced look towards his hostess. "Well, I allaows I was wrong thet time and I may be *this*, but . . ."

"Good-evening, folks."

The words, accompanied by a knock on the open door, were uttered with a suggestion of hesitancy in a manly young voice. All save Camille looked around from their places before the fire, whither they had moved, for the evening air had become somewhat chill. The girl was still engaged in clearing away the supper dishes by the wavering light of the resinous pinewood blaze.

Framed in the narrow doorway, with the soft

night shadows as a background, stood a tall, virile young form—that of the youth who had lent his timely aid at the Fayville station. He had removed his slouch hat and his face was more clearly discernible; a countenance well-favored and manly, it was of the purest Anglo-Saxon type. Above a brow both broad and high, a shock of hair, light brown and somewhat wavy, was carelessly brushed back; from beneath it shone two gray-blue eyes of the type which can express, unaided, every emotion from flashing anger to merriment. His nose was straight and shapely, but large enough both to show strength of character and to supply an excellent pair of lungs—if depth of chest meant anything—with mountain air; and his somewhat broad mouth and chin, slightly cleft, alike bore out the impression of firmness. Now a propitiatory little smile, which partially displayed his even, white teeth, made his look one of joyous, 'though earnest, youth. As for his well-framed, muscular body, it was still clad in riding clothes which, save for an inexpensive and serviceable coat of civilian cut, had obviously once seen service in the army. A starred silver button in his lapel told the same story—and more.

“Why, I believe that it’s our knight of the wheel!” exclaimed Rose, with pleasure in her voice. “Don’t hesitate. I’m sure that we’re all pleased to see you again.”

Still, hesitate a little he did, with his expression changing to uncertainty, and womanly intuition

told her that the alteration was the result of Judd's voice, speaking from behind her and seconding her invitation to enter. The words were hospitable enough but the tone in which they were spoken seemed cold, if not actually hostile.

As she turned, with a question in her eyes, Judd stood up, saying, "Well, I reckon, I'll be gettin' along."

"No. Sit down again, Judd, the evening's young," she commanded, and he answered, "Kain't. I haint much uv a night-hawk, naow a-days. You-all come on daown with me. No, I don't guess thet you can. Well, see you to-morrow." He put on his hat, walked to the door and out into the night.

"If that isn't just like Judd Amos!" Rose spoke with a suggestion of exasperation.

"He took his departure in just the same manner the first time that I met him," laughed Donald, but the new-comer regretfully remarked that perhaps his arrival was the cause.

"Why should it have been, Mr. . . . I'm sorry, but, although Judd told us your name yesterday, I've forgotten it," apologized the woman.

"I'm Virgil Gayheart, ma'am. And I know that this is Dr. MacDonald and that you were 'Smiles' Webb. You see, I used to come over here to the school, ten or twelve years ago—you even taught me for a few days, although you were only a little older than I, yourself."

"Why, of course I remember, now—you almost

always had a tiny garter snake or a lizard in your pocket. Do you remember the time that you told me, with the utmost seriousness, that on the way over the mountain you had seen two wood snakes which had each other by the tail and kept swallowing until both had completely disappeared?"

"Come over here and let me shake the hand of the youthful Baron Munchausen," laughed Donald, and when the smiling youth obeyed he called, "Camille, come out of that corner and be properly introduced to our twentieth century Sir Walter Raleigh. This is our little Belgian ward and almost daughter—Mlle. Camille Laporte, Mr. Gayheart."

The girl, who had been standing silently in the shadows with a thick crockery cup poised over the dishpan, now came shyly forward, blushing with embarrassment. The long dark lashes concealed her eyes as she hesitatingly held out the unoccupied hand and said in a low, hurried voice, "*Je suis charmée de faire votre connaissance, Monsieur.*"

"*Pas de quoi, mademoiselle.* No, that isn't right—*A votre service*—O Lord, that's wrong, too." He was now stammering and flushing as deeply as she. Both Rose and Donald laughed and the latter said heartily, "Let it go at that; the intention is what counts. Er . . . by the way, Camille can speak perfect English, when she likes."

"*Mais, non,* Donald! I speak it very badly."

"You see?" The two younger people joined in the laughter, shook hands with the warmth bred of mutual

sympathy and Virgil accepted the chair which the girl moved forward. There followed a moment or two of general conversation in the course of which they learned that he still lived at Rattlesnake on the road to Beaten Creek. Then Rose suddenly inquired, "Why did you hint that your arrival drove Judd away, Virgil?"

"I shouldn't have done so—perhaps it was not true in the least, but . . . Well, the fact is, as you may remember, that one of my older brothers shot Judd's father, Oh, I reckon that it must have been ten or twelve years ago."

Camille uttered a startled little exclamation.

"Of course I remember, now," Rose responded. "Why, the very night that it happened I was over at the Amos' cabin taking care of baby Lou, and saw them bring 'Big Judd' home—It was 'Big Juddy' and 'little Judd', then. Your brother—wasn't his name Joel?—couldn't have been more than a boy . . ."

"He was fifteen," interpolated Virgil.

"But they got into some sort of a quarrel after drinking moonshine together up at the still hidden in the rocky hollow on top of the mountain—you know the spot, Donald." Rose shuddered a little. She had never been able fully to banish the haunting memory of that moment when she had parted the curtain of bushes and, for the only time in her life, seen two strong men—Judd and the man who was to become her husband—in fierce animal combat.

"It was the first time I had ever witnessed death. I shall never forget the expression of anguish and

hatred on the wounded man's face as he lay on the rude litter of boughs, nor the look on Judd's as he swore to 'get' Joel Gayheart, some day. I cried and clung to him, begging him not to start another feud, and he wouldn't listen. Oh, that was an awful night! Joel was never caught, was he, Virgie?"

"No. He might have been freed, for the others said he shot in self-defense, but he turned outlaw and finally disappeared altogether."

"I'm glad. But think of it, Don! A lad of fifteen—just the age when city boys are hardly more than into long trousers and High School—an outlaw, living the life of a hunted animal in some rocky cave on top of these mountains. Yet here it has happened time and again."

"And is still happening, Mrs. MacDonald," added their visitor, and she interrupted to say, "Call me 'Rose', if you like, Virgie. It's the mountain way and I'm mountaineer again."

"Thank you, I should like to—for I hope to be really the friend of . . . of *all* of you, while you're here," he answered, and the doctor said, "Good, then make it 'Donald' and 'Camille' as well."

Virgil smiled quickly toward the girl who had taken her place in the semi-circle before the fire and was sitting, silent and enthralled. "What I was going to say is that Judd's other brother, Bud, and his boy, Malvary, have been hiding somewhere up Beaten way, for months, and Mally is only about sixteen."

"Yes, Judd told me; I'm terribly sorry," the wo-

man replied. "I never cared especially for Bud, but Mally was a bright, likable and handsome little boy, as I remember him, and the thought of *him*, an *outlaw*, hurts. More moonshining, wasn't it?"

Virgil nodded in affirmation.

"A band of them had a flourishing still and were doing a regular wholesale and retail business in corn whiskey."

"Retail?" interrupted Donald, interrogatorily.

"Yes, sir. I never tried it out myself—hate the stuff—but it was common knowledge, hereabouts, that if you were to go up there with a 'little brown jug' and leave it, with a certain amount of money on a certain flat rock, at the same time ringing a little bell hidden in a crevice, you could come back in an hour or so and find the money gone and the jug mysteriously full of moonshine."

"Some system!" laughed the older man, and his wife cried, "Don't, Don. It's a long way from being a laughing matter. Moonshining has brought a curse upon these hills—it kills souls and wills and often leads to the killing of men, as well. We'll never prosper until it is stamped, or educated, out of the mountain men."

"But is it really being carried on as much now as it was before prohibition was put into . . . well, perhaps not 'effect' but in the form of a National edict?"

"As *much*? Twice—yes, ten times more, sir," responded Virgil. "The marshals and sheriffs are doing

their da . . . their best, in most cases; but for every still they destroy two new ones spring up. There's good reason. A bushel of corn that sells for one hundred and fifty *cents* here, will make three gallons of illicit whiskey for which they sometimes get as much as one hundred and fifty *dollars*. Convictions won't stop 'em except temporarily, and they are hard to obtain unless a man is actually caught with the goods, for, if the people who are summoned as witnesses are not engaged in the business themselves they have relatives or neighbors who are, and are naturally afraid to peach. Most of them drink the stuff, too, and know that, if moonshining is stopped, their supply stops, too."

"It's terrible!" exclaimed Rose.

"It certainly is," her husband agreed, willfully misinterpreting her thought. "I drank some, once, and once was enough. Phaugh! Unpleasantly flavored, liquid fire!"

"Judd . . . Judd wasn't mixed up in it, was he?" There was a sudden sinking in Rose's heart. If the practice were so general, and the reward so great, might he not have broken his youthful promise to her?

"No'm. He's made a lot of enemies in this county by being dead set against it. Some folks even said he'd tip the officers off to his own brother's still, but I don't reckon anybody really believes *that*. They say, now that he knows where Bud and Mally are hiding, and smuggles stuff up to 'em from his store. Nobody

blames him; they're wanted only as accessories, for the men who did the shooting are in the pen, now."

"I'm glad of that," interrupted Rose.

"Yes'm. Folks can talk all they want about 'personal rights'; but moonshining, whether it's here or in the cities, is un-American. It's plumb against the law."

"Of course it is, Virgil."

Donald smiled with amusement at his wife's emphatic tone, but the other went on, as if apologetic for his outburst, "I guess there's some excuse for us mountaineers, though; America doesn't mean much to most of us. People in the cities are putting up a big holler about 'Americanizing' the immigrants. That's all right—it probably needs to be done—but it's about time someone started on us down here. Most of the folks hereabouts speak of the United States like some foreign country, outside the mountains. They vote—sometimes; pay taxes—when they're made to. That's about all America means to them. And there are *five million* of us mountaineers, I've heard, most of us as ignorant as that! It doesn't seem like there could be that many people plumb lost in these hills for a hundred to two hundred years, and whose grandpappies were in old Virginny for I don't know how much longer back; but I guess there are. Five million of us, and yet some old fogies down in Washington talk about our being a 'decaying, doomed race' that might as well be let alone to die out, like the Indians. I was down there and heard 'em, once.

"That's *their* idea," he said, with youthful scorn in his voice. "Then I read a story about us, once, where the author raved about our being the finest, purest stock in America, and having the blood of Saxon kings and Norman conquerors—or something like that—in our veins. That's mostly rot, too. Some of our ancestors were all right, I reckon—real pioneers, but a good many of 'em were pretty poor material who came because they couldn't stand even what civilization there was in Virginny. But, at that, I guess our blood's as good as the blood of those fellows in Washington, who sit in fine offices making up statistics and saying, 'Tut, tut. Very sad, but that race has run out. It's beyond helping'. Darn 'em! I want to show them whether it is, or not."

Rose glanced quickly at her husband, and saw in his eyes the reflection of her own wonderment. How had this lad, a native of Rattlesnake, near Beaten Creek, gained the inspiration and the knowledge to talk like that? His language was not cultured, but it was as unlike that of most mountain men as white is unlike black. An Abraham Lincoln might have spoken thus; but this lad, who, a few moments before, had seemed so frankly youthful and ill-at-ease? It *was* rather astonishing. She looked at him, curiously.

The fire had burned down to a mass of ruddy embers. Camille bent and thrust a dry branch among them, and it lived again, its leaping tongues of flame

filling the little room with warm, flickering light. It beat upon their visitor's well-knit figure and intent face, and seemed to have kindled its spiritual counterpart, for his eyes were glowing eagerly. He leaned forward and clasped his hands on his khaki-clad knees in a forceful attitude, but when he spoke again it was more slowly and with a note of pathos.

"Well maybe we aren't worth saving,—I don't know. Men that study about races might say that we're not."

"Oh, no, Virgil."

"Yes. We've sunk pretty low. But hanged if I wouldn't like to see the experiment tried, on our mountain kids, anyway. And not just by soft-hearted and soft-headed missionaries and settlement workers—we have them, and they're all right as far as they go; but they can't make much impression on five million of us."

"By the government, then—the way it's trying to educate the Indians?" suggested Donald.

"Maybe. It seems to make an awful mess of things like that generally, though. No, sir. I mean by some people with both brains and guts . . . Oh, excuse me, that's army talk. But they'd need 'em. We Americans need to be Americanized. If only some real *leaders* could be trained up among our mountain boys and girls, we might get busy and save ourselves."

"Look here, boy, where the devil did you get hold

of a theory and a . . . er . . . an inspiration like this?" Donald demanded, moved to speak, equally by curiosity and the stirring of a deeper feeling.

"I reckon it was in the army, sir; a little in camp here and more overseas. If I *am* a real American, myself, it started when I saw a bunch of Roosians, Polacks, Wops and the like, in a squad called 'Americans All'—maybe you saw them in the city?"

Rose shook her head, and he continued, "They drilled and made little speeches in broken English. At first I laughed at 'em, but after a while I got to asking myself if I was as good an American as they were, and I had to say 'No.' Those 'furriners'—as we call 'em—had caught the Spirit of America, and I hadn't."

"But why should you have had to say 'No,' Mr. Virgil?" begged Camille, her interest conquering her bashfulness as she listened, keeping her large eyes fixed eagerly upon his face. "Is it not that you were in your wonderful army, and fighting for your country—and mine?" she added softly.

"I was in the army, yes. But I hated it—*then*. I don't like to tell you this, folks, but you might as well hear it, first as last." He paused; then continued hurriedly and with his eyes on the floor, "I was drafted and . . . well, I dodged the draft, like hundreds of others in these hills."

"Why?" asked Donald, bluntly.

"I don't guess I can make you understand, sir. It wasn't that I was afraid, either of fighting or

going across the ocean. Lots of 'em were, scared blue at the idea of being sent to another island—'country,' I mean—not knowing how they'd ever get back, or even get word to their families again."

"Poor things! No wonder," breathed Rose.

"No'm. You know the mountaineers. Why, there was a fellow in camp with me who deserted and walked home—he lived only twelve miles away. When they caught him the captain asked him why he did it and he said that he didn't mean any harm. He'd never been away from his mammy a day, before, and he was afraid that she'd worry with him so far off. The captain told him that *his* mother was twelve *hundred* miles away, and the poor boob sat right down on the floor, and gasped, 'Why, sir, you'll never get tew go back thet fur as long as you live.' I'd got a pretty good common-school education down at Fayville, but I *hadn't* learned Americanism, any more than the rest. The United States didn't mean anything to me. I loved to be independent, and no one had ever taught me the meaning of 'service,' or what the war was about."

"Yes, we understand, Virgie," interrupted Rose, with almost maternal tenderness. He gave her a quick look of gratitude and went on, still more painfully.

"When I was called, I . . . I beat it—ran away with several others. For nearly a month we lived on top of one of these mountings, with pine boughs for beds and coffee sacks for coverlids. We got our food

from home, nights—made regular paths down to them. Some of the rest finally got away altogether; joined a band of real outlaws. They wanted me to, but . . . well, I hadn't run away for that. I merely *thought* I was keeping my freedom. What a fool I was!" He ended bitterly.

"But you finally changed your mind?" suggested Donald.

"No, sir. I had it changed for me—by an old army sergeant and a couple of local deputy-sheriffs. They . . . they ran me to earth, like a ground hog, and, when I wouldn't come out of my hole, they . . . they shot me." Virgil spoke the last three words of the sentence in a tone which was barely audible, and at the same time held up his right hand, on the wrist of which was a long white furrow.

There followed a moment of painful silence. Then Rose whispered, pityingly, "Oh, you poor boy!"

"No'm. I had it coming to me. Well, while the sergeant in charge of rounding us up was giving me first aid, he . . . he told me a few things, straight from the shoulder; he knew how to handle men. Then he put me on my honor, and I finally agreed to go to camp of my own free will. In fact . . ." a suggestion of a twinkle crept into his eyes. "In fact I started 'soldiering' right there, and helped guard some of the rest, who had been caught in the same net. They had all celebrated their last day at home by getting gloriously drunk on moonshine, and it was sort of funny to hear them swearing to

blow up the whole U. S. army. We got them down to the county jail at Fayville, and I'll never forget 'Bad Bill' Cress that night." Virgil was laughing boyishly, now.

"He was roaring drunk, and thought he had a special grudge against me. We locked him in the only real cell in the place, and when he saw me out in the street he fired the only 'fireable' thing he had at me—an old hairbrush. Then, for hours, he kept bellowing at the 'damned fools' outside, to hand it back to him; said they *knew* he couldn't go into the army unless he had his hair brushed."

As the others laughed the youth became serious again. "Of course my explanation isn't an excuse, but . . ." He ended by extending his strong sinewy hands in an expressive gesture. "I was shipped overseas in the 33rd Division with next to no training, and there—in camp and in the fighting—I gained my first idea of what it all meant and *found* myself, little by little. And I learned what America meant and what the flag stood for—I don't believe that I had ever even seen a flag before I got to camp."

"I guess that you did learn your lesson, boy," said Donald, quietly. "For I see that you wear the silver star."

"Yes, sir. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I'm prouder of *that* wound than I am of anything else that I have. I . . . I sort of pretend that it wiped out the other one," he added, growing boyishly red.

"I'm sure that it did, Virgie," declared Rose, softly.

CHAPTER IX

THE GREATER VISION

A NUMBER of rifle shots, fired in rapid succession from the creek road below, broke into the silence which followed Smiles' affirmation and caused a somewhat startled flurry in the group before the fire. Paling slightly, Camille caught hold of Donald's hand, and Virgil sprang to the door to peer down the hillside, which was vaguely illuminated by a half-grown moon. He laughed a little as he exclaimed, "I thought so; there's no mistaking that elephant of a mule. It's the old friend whom I've been telling you about — 'Bad Bill' — going home from Fayville and announcing the fact to the people of Webb's Gap."

"Drunk?" inquired the doctor, somewhat relieved.

"Gloriously; hardly able to stick on. He isn't moonshining, himself, at present — lazy not repentant —; but it's common knowledge that he is bootlegging for a couple of our first citizens at the County Seat, on a fifty-fifty basis. They pay for the stuff and give him half for getting it. Then, since the rule is to drink it at once, he gets just twice as intoxicated as either of them."

"Lucky he isn't supplying *three* or more," laughed Donald.

"There he goes again! I should think I were back in France—or that it were Christmas eve."

" 'Christmas eve?' " echoed Camille in bewilderment, and Virgil answered, "Yes. Almost all the men hereabouts get full then and go riding and shooting up and down the creeks. . . ."

"In honor of the advent of the Prince of Peace," Rose added, with bitterness in her voice. "I can remember how I used to dread and hate it. Someone was almost always wounded."

The noise had awakened the baby, whose little voice was now raised alike in protest and a demand for nourishment. Rose excused herself for a few moments and departed into the little bedroom, from the door of which Smiles, Junior, with assistance, waved good-night to the rest. Ordinarily, Camille would have accompanied them, but she did not move and Rose's smile held both amusement and forgiveness.

Until her return Donald plied their visitor with questions about his experiences in France and the other answered with the reticence common to ex-service men. And, as they talked, the girl's eyes were constantly fixed on him, except when he directed his own towards her. Then her long lashes were hastily lowered to meet the rising color in her cheeks.

When Rose rejoined the group her first words were, "I've been listening, too, Virgie, and wondering how you learned to talk so fluently and express

yourself so correctly—you won't mind my saying that, for I'm 'mountain,' myself. Where did you obtain so good an education?"

He flushed slightly, in part with pleasure, as he denied the suggestion, adding, "I've just happened to have read a good deal, that's all. Poor Pappy couldn't read at all—he never had a chance—; but he was bound that I *should*, and so I got to go to the settlement school down at Fayville, between planting and harvesting seasons, until I had enough units to cover the four years in high school—or what passes for 'high school,' here. Then I started to read law by myself, evenings, and I was still at that when . . . when I was drafted. Over there I came pretty near making myself unpopular with the fellows by taking all the army and "Y" courses that I could, when we were in billets, and, after I was wounded, I was sent to the Officers' Training School at Langres until my unit was ordered home."

"So, they were going to make a commissioned officer of you, were they?" inquired Donald.

"They were going to *try* to, sir. I was discharged a sergeant, though. I didn't care about the commission, especially; but I should like to have remained and got a bit more education, if it hadn't meant staying in the army."

"Yes, I can understand your wanting to get home. Still your experience was as good as a college education," said Rose.

"Maybe, in a way. I wish that I might have had both, though. It's too late, now."

"Oh, I don't know about that, How old *are* you, Virgie?"

"Twenty-two last fall."

"But plenty of men—especially those from the farms or mountains—go to college when they're older than that."

"Yes; but I have got to work. Father is dead, now—he died of the 'flu' while I was away—and there's our little place to be farmed, unless I can get to do the kind of work I *want*."

"And what's that?"

"Teaching."

Rose glanced quickly toward her husband, saw that he was looking at her, and her eyes flashed him a message which his mind, attuned to her's, caught and understood. It seemed as though Fate were weaving their lives into a new pattern, whether they would or no, and adding thread after thread. Humpy Hite insisted that they had been sent there for no other purpose than to erect a mountain school upon his land. Here was a mountain youth whose life's ambition was to teach, if the way could be uncovered for him.

"But that should be simple, I should think," said the woman. "With your settlement school training, and the other education that you have received, you could certainly pass the examination for county school teacher. Of course you might have to brush up a bit with someone, first. Oh, by the way, Virgie, is Professor Jackson still alive and teaching?"

"Yes'm, both. He must be over eighty years old, but he's still grinding 'em out."

"And who *is* the distinguished Professor Jackson?" demanded Donald.

"He's the mountain wizard educator, who gives a six weeks' intensive course to would-be navigators on the sea of learning and seldom fails to get them past the examination rocks. He has copies of the tests for ages back and has acquired an almost uncanny ability to guess what questions the examining board will ask, besides having a 'pull' with it, some say. You see I know all about it, because I was planning before *you* came and put different ideas into my head, to go to him in a year or two and have him make a certificate out of me, and . . ."

"A *what?*" roared the man, and Rose laughed with him as she replied, "it's the old mountaineer way of saying 'prepare one so that he can pass the County examination and so receive a certificate to teach,' but how much more terse and picturesque!"

"Well, why don't you go to him and be made into a certificate, my boy?" grinned the man.

"Because, sir, that isn't what I want to teach—at least it isn't the *big* thing. Of course county education is necessary; it helps, I reckon, although sometimes I think that it doesn't, for what is the good of giving people a new tool that they don't know how to use? The children go to the school, off and on, for a few terms, get a little education and

then just go back to raising hogs and hominy, exactly the way their pappies and grandpappies did before them—and living just the same. Besides, most of the fathers and mothers, who can't read or write a word themselves, haven't any use for education for their children; and you know how much the ordinary kid will go to school, unless he's made to.

"Why, Mrs. MacDonald, I've heard my own grandpappy Combs say, 'What good'll larnin' dew you, boy? I've got erlong right smart without hit. I knows a dollar when I sees hit and haow tew hang ontew hit. Pleasure in eddication? Hell, *I* git pleasure enough out uv my dollars and I reckon I've more uv 'em than *you'll* ever have, ef you waste your time fiddlin' around with this hyar book larnin' '."

He stopped, apparently somewhat ashamed of his outburst and having spoken thus of his own kin. Then he added, abruptly, "Maybe you see what I mean."

"Yes. 'You can lead an ass to knowledge but you can't make him think,' " misquoted Donald. "Still, a gradual change is bound to come, isn't it? Especially if the state succeeds in educating the older generation a little through it's midnight schools and"

"*If* it does," broke in Virgil, with youthful scorn in his voice. "How far do you think the state is going to get with its 'moonlight schools,' when the man who is supposed to teach the fathers and mothers at night is about all in from teaching their children

in the daytime? And when the 'pupils' are middle-aged men and women who have been working in the fields or houses all day long and sometimes live miles from the school? The idea of mother and father climbing onto the same old mule and riding off to school by moonlight—over *these* roads—with their primers in their saddlebags in search of knowledge, is great . . . I don't think! If they *should*, who would keep the half a dozen youngest children, all under seven, from being burned to death if the eight-year-old piled too much wood on the fire?"

"No, I suppose that it isn't feasible," said Rose, sadly. "Humpty Hite's generation is lost."

"I reckon. Of course it might be done by carrying education right into the homes, but that's about out of the question. No, the hope of the mountains is in its babies."

The woman smiled in quick and sympathetic appreciation. It was her motto. Then she asked, "But what is to be done, Virgil? Education has got to come, and you wouldn't be talking like this unless you had thought about some other way. It is through the settlement and missionary schools? They keep the children longer and must make more of an impression upon them."

He leaned forward again, and his face resumed its former intense look. "I don't guess so—not the way they are generally run," he answered. "I may be a sort of a traitor, for I went to the settlement school, and a good one. But I have been thinking

about it, a lot, and I can't help feeling that their ordinary system is all wrong, too—or at least only half right."

He paused, and smiled a little shame-facedly as he added, "Maybe you-all think that I'm a conceited young fool to be criticizing everything, like this."

"Not by a darned sight," responded Donald, heartily. "I'm getting interested. Fire away."

"All right; but I'm like as not to shoot disconnected ideas about like a machine gun does bullets, once I get going, sir. Well, take my own school down at Fayville. I reckon that it's pretty well endowed and it has several hundred pupils—it points with pride to the fact that it has given a good education to a big bunch of mountain boys and girls, and taught them to live decently, as well. It *is* doing a good work in a way, and the people in charge have a high ideal—I'm sure of that—but somehow it seems to me like an awful waste of both labor and material."

Donald interrupted again with a blunt demand for an explanation, and Virgil twisted uneasily in his chair and flushed a little, whereupon Camille shot a reproachful glance at the questioner.

"Well, it's like this, sir—at least, it's the way it strikes me. The little missionary schools, where one or two teachers are simply working themselves to death for us generally unappreciative mountaineers, are only scratching the surface, here and there, while the bigger schools, like the one at Fayville, which has a teacher for every three or four pupils
~ . . ."

"No!" exclaimed Donald and the youth nodded his affirmation, going on, ". . . although they train the brains and improve the manners of a bigger number, simply lift the individual out of the mud and land him in . . . in discontent."

"Of course, but discontent with the old is the main-spring of progress."

"Maybe it is, of individual progress, sir. But I'm thinking about our whole mountain people, and it hasn't worked out that way, here. One or two things happen in almost every case, as I know for a fact. Either the boy or girl wholly lacks ambition, goes home again, and, after a little while of dissatisfaction with everything, simply slumps back into the old way of living—in which case the time and money is practically a dead loss—or they can't stand it, break the home ties altogether and go to one of the nearer towns or cities and are simply swallowed up. And that's just as much or more of a loss for the mountains. *They* have made some personal gain, but they can't meet the city-bred people on an equal plane in the fight for worthwhile positions, and generally end up small clerks or motor-men. You can't expect to jump over a hundred years in six or eight school terms—the handicap's too big for all except the rare exceptions, men like Lincoln, who will do it anyway." Virgil's eyes glowed.

"I read an article about us mountaineers, once, in which the writer told how the race had gone downhill from . . . from in-breeding, and he ended by

saying something like this: 'Let the older generation *die* out and the new *move* out; there is no future in those mountains for anyone. The race is doomed, in a few generations more, at the best.'

"But I don't believe it!" Virgil's words rang out like the sharp, challenging notes of a bugle, and Rose instinctively clapped her hands together softly, and cried, "Good!"

"Supposing it's true that our race is pretty badly run out at the heel—and it isn't strange, the way we live and inter-marry and with our diet so poor and disease so general—it *has* the purest blood in America, and there must be some good shoots left, which could be brought back to bear fruit, even if the greater part has to die out. And these mountains are ours; our grandpappies won them—they belong to us, and we to them. I love it; it's a fine country, for all its rocks and mud."

"It is! I love it, too, Virgil," exclaimed Rose, eagerly.

"That writer said that the soil is thin and will soon be worn out the way we cultivate it, and that may be true, too. But there are other ways. We can learn to terrace, as they do the hillsides in France . . ." Camille's face lighted up and she smiled, ". . . and there are plenty of other things which could be carried on here, anyway. But we mountaineers have got to be made over, first. We're got to be made over in every way; in character, customs and manner of thought."

"We've lost our grip on the great things—the glory of service, responsibility, *leadership*. Why, there were plenty of mountain men in my unit overseas—some of them had been in the army for years—who were perfectly capable of making good officers and many of them were offered commissions. But almost every one refused the chance, afraid of the responsibility. The trouble is that we've forgotten how to lead; and the schools hurt more than they help—they repress us still more and make machines.

"But I believe that some of our boys and girls can be trained to do the needed thing,—return home and lead their own kind to a higher level. If it's ever going to be done it has got to be by us, from within. *That's* what I want to do—make leaders of men, right here in our mountains."

"Well, why don't you try it, then?" Donald had become so interested in their unusual visitor that he determined to test him out a little, and spoke cynically. "Your criticisms have sounded logical, but they have all been merely destructive. If you *have* any remedy, why don't you try it out, yourself?"

"How can I? How could I, alone? I have a plan that I think might work, and I'd tackle the job tomorrow, even 'though it would mean bucking my own people and the old order—the satisfied stand-patters—all along the line, if I felt there was any use; for *me* to do it, I mean. But you know how hard it is to change people, and . . ."

"Indeed, we do," broke in Rose, sympathetically.

"To the everyday sort of mind what *is*, is best. The pioneers in any movement have to fight every inch of the way, just as our ancestors did over range after range of these hills."

"And generally get themselves crucified, burned at the stake or shot for their pains," added Donald.

Virgil answered doggedly, "I know it."

"Well, isn't that the lot of every reformer? And you're advocating a sort of revolution," persisted the man.

"Supposing it is, what does it matter?" demanded Rose, her eyes flashing with the light of battle. "One life doesn't amount to anything—God thinks in thousands, of men and years alike. But a cause . . . !"

"*Salut, Jeanne d'Arc!*" smiled her husband and Camille cried hotly, "*Ne vous mouquez pas, Donald! C'est vrai.*"

The visitor sent her a quick smile of appreciation. "Perhaps I think with Mlle. Camille that you shouldn't make a joke of Mrs. MacDonald's declaration. But one might have the spirit of a Joan of Arc—I don't say that *I* can claim it, you know—; but even if he did have it, it wouldn't be worth much in a matter of this kind without something to correspond to her archers and lancers."

"Meaning, I suppose, special training."

"Yes, sir. I've seen enough of the world to know that a man who tackles a physical opponent, or problem, unprepared, is likely to get licked—and in a hurry. That's why I feel so helpless. What do I

know about putting over civic education and community work? Nothing; and what I *don't* know would fill a library! I've thought and dreamed about it ever since I got home, but my hands are sort of tied. I did make one attempt, though. When I got home I was partially out of commission as a result of my wound and I applied for vocational training in community work. But when I suggested it the bureau looked blank—at least the letter I received did—and advised me that I would do better to learn carpentry, that trained mechanics got higher wages, anyway. Bureaus are funny things, and funny things happen when they pull the bit of red tape prepared in advance to meet a given situation." Virgil spoke more lightly. "They sent me *two* sets of orders, a day apart, one to report at Cincinnati and the other at Lexington, and likewise two passes. I saved one of them as a souvenir."

He took out a battered pocket book and finally found in it a paper, which he handed to Rose. She read aloud, "'Good for one transportation from Rattlesnake to Fayville, via steamship or railroad (Pullman excepted).' What did you do with the other? Use it?" she asked, when their laughter had subsided.

"No'm. I sent it back with a request for a permit to ride an old blind mule. It hasn't come, yet . . . and my disability has disappeared." He stretched his tall and muscular figure and drew up his chest with youthful pride.

"And if you could have the opportunity to go away and be especially trained in community work, what then?" Donald asked, bluntly.

"I don't reckon that I should go, now." Rose experienced a sense of real disappointment at his words, for he had stirred her soul strongly with his vision. Was he, then, like all the rest, and his enthusiasm for the cause which he advocated confined to high-sounding declarations? But he had continued, and the inner glow had again superseded the smile on his strong, pleasant face. "You see I'm beginning to hope that I won't have to do it alone."

"Why, how is that? Has anyone started the sort of work . . . ?"

"No'm, not yet, but . . . folks up Beaten way are saying that *you* are planning to open a school for them, there."

"Well, I'll be darned!" ejaculated Donald. "They used to tell us that the three quickest ways of spreading news were 'telegraph, telephone or tell a woman,' but, for 'woman' I'm going to substitute 'Mountaineer'."

"Well, it's true, Virgie; but not anything like what you have in mind, I'm afraid. Just a little ABC and two-times-two school for the kiddies, perhaps, along with a little hospital and clinic."

"Don't do it, Mrs. MacDonald. I rode down here tonight to beg you not to. You're starting fresh. Won't you start *right*? . . . I mean, give my scheme a fair trial and see if we can't have a little demon-

stration plant here, to show the world that leaders can be made as well as born. I'll do all I can; I'll work my head off for you, if you only will. Perhaps you don't know much more than I do about how to do it, but you've lived in a big city—so has Dr. MacDonald—and surely you must be acquainted with people who do, or how to get in touch with a trained community worker who would come. I'll write to them; take what little money I have and go and see them and make them *want* to come, if necessary. Perhaps you think that I'm looking for a job, but I'm not. If I can get a living for myself, my mother and Omie—she's my little sister—that's all I want until I am trained, too, and worthy of my hire. You can do it, I know you can. Of course it will be hard. We'll have to fight, but I reckon we're all fighters. You have visions, too. I know that, and I won't let them crucify you." He made the promise with the splendidly egotistical courage of youth.

"You said awhile back that you're mountaineer again. It's for *our* people, *our* mountains. Please be Joan of the Mountains! The French girl gave a crown and a kingdom back to her king. You can give a lost race back to America."

CHAPTER X

TWO LETTERS AND A BRIEF DISCUSSION

" . . . THAT, Margaret, is the gist of our remarkable caller's declaration. After he had left—Camille went as far as the porch with him and the two children stood in the moonlight until I had to summon her in and send her to bed—Donald and I sat up before the dying fire until almost midnight, talking it over, and we came nearer to having a real quarrel than we ever had before in our joint lives. I scarcely need tell you its cause. Perhaps I *am* visionary and over-optimistic, but so intangible a thing as a vision must be the sub-keel of every forward-moving ship and optimism greases her launching ways. Pessimism only throws sand into the gears—to change my simile abruptly.

Of course I could not but love him for the stand he took, since I knew that he was opposing my plan merely because it would mean my working myself into a shadow. Besides, he could foresee the actual difficulties better than I, I suppose—a woman may dream, but it *generally* takes a man-mind to achieve,—that is why God put both kinds into the world, that they might be complementary parts, one to the other.

If we really go ahead with Virgil's vision it will take thousands and thousands of dollars before we get through. What little *we* have left would be but a tiny drop in the bottom of the bucket and that will

be swallowed up at once in the building of the little home-hospital which I mean to have, anyway. He wanted to know where the rest was to come from and of course all I could answer was, 'It *will* come, if we wish and work hard enough—God will see to that,' which, from an everyday worldly standpoint sounded utterly foolish. But it will, Margaret, somehow, if we can make a real start and make our need known to the world. And again, we can, if we will.

In a way I hated to press this idea, for it means that he must sacrifice so much, along with me. I'm sure that he will be better—be well—soon, but, even crippled as he is, he could return home after a little rest and earn thousands a year, if only in consultation. But what are a few years? Of course, all I plan to do is help start the ball a-rolling. Then, when sufficient 'Virgils' are trained, we can slip quietly out to spend our declining years in dear old Boston, and leave the task to the ones who should carry it on, the mountaineers.

In the end Donald half-yielded, tired, I suppose, of fighting against a woman whose last word is never reached until she is dead. But his surrender was conditional; conditioned upon my finding the sort of trained Community leader whose presence is absolutely essential. I am as ignorant of the hows and whys as Smiles, junior.

Of course I do not have to explain my reason for writing this to *you*. The fact that you are the only person I know trained for socially educational work with children would be enough; but you will surely recall, as I do, your own enthusiastic proposition along almost exactly the same lines. You and Virgil are in some respects as far apart as the poles, but his vision and your education coincide strangely.

Now I am going to say something with the almost brutal frankness of man speaking to man. I have heard your real purpose seriously questioned; scoffed at, in fact. I have heard you called 'faddish', and not in the least stable in your enthusiastic dreams for human betterment. I'll add—not by way of propitiation, but because it's so—that I took the opposite side. I *think* that I can read human nature (who doesn't?) and, anyway, women should stand up for each other, the way men do, and we generally don't.

But now I'm frankly throwing down the gauntlet to you!

If you meant it, and mean it still, pack up a suitcase or two and come—to 'the land of the saddlebags.' Don't bring a trunk, at first; you might not need it and the sight of one would probably frighten the natives as much as a 'nelephant.' Yes, come if you meant it; but don't stir a step unless you feel sure you have screwed your courage to the sticking point, and are mentally, morally and physically ready to fight!

You'll certainly be called upon to endure physical hardship, poor food (poor, that is, from an epicurean standpoint), hurt feelings and every known discouragement—I'm perfectly sure of that. Yes, and perhaps danger, as well. Feuds, moonshine and murder—the latter pair are as inseparable as were the Siamese twins—are here not romantic memories of by-gone days, but ever-present and very unpleasant realities.

Really, as I write this, knowing how true it is, and how almost innumerable are the difficulties ahead and round about us, I am beginning to lose courage for you. But there's a wonder-work to be done;

I've caught the gleam of the vision and I share Virgil's faith that it can be done by someone trained and true.

I hereby pledge myself not to think a bit the worse of you if you say, 'not I,' for I know how easy it is to make declarations and promises such as you made that afternoon in Boston, on the spur of an enthusiastic moment; and I pledge myself, too, not to be *very* disappointed if you should flee for home again, after a week or two.

Well, dear, that's my story and my proposition. 'Take it or leave it,' as our soldier boys used to say.

Affectionately your friend,
ROSE MACDONALD."

BEACON STREET,
BOSTON.

"My dearest 'Smiles':

(I've simply got to call you that even though I am, as yet, barely acquainted with you.) Your wonderful letter is here beside me. As I glance at it I am thrilled anew with the thought of what it contains! That I am actually going into your Cumberlands to live with, and be one with, those picturesque mountain people seems almost too wonderful a thing to have possibly fallen to my lot!

Of course I am coming to you. Do you think that I would pass *that* opportunity on to another? Mother has pleaded, father has stormed, but I have always done just what I wished with them in the end, and so . . . I am coming—coming to give my very best to you, dear Smiles, and to Virgil's Great Cause. I like to whisper the words over and over, they are so filled with poetry and romance; don't you think so?

How much real help I can be I do not know. Of course, I have had a great deal of training, theoretical and actual, in social and community service work, yet I feel myself unworthy, somehow. Your catalogue of hardships and dangers has not terrified me—I shall *love* that—but sometimes the thought of the magnitude of the task appalls.

But I shall come to you, resolved to give of my best and *I shall stay*—if only to justify your faith in me and prove that ‘certain people’ are wrong in their estimation of my character.

Work in the city slums, which I have laid out for the early summer, and a few engagements which cannot very well be broken, will prevent me from coming to you until early in August, but I understand from what you said at the start of your inspiring letter that your first dear little house will not be ready at Beaten Creek (what a picturesque name!) until then.

And now I must tell you of a strange coincidence which occurred just this afternoon and makes me more than ever feel that *Fate* must be guiding us in all this for some hidden reason. By the merest chance I met Philip—perhaps I should say ‘Dr. Bentley’—and his friend, Dr. Hunter, the one who is going to be with you in the hospital work there. The *latter* was very cordial, and, when I told him of my overwhelming good fortune, he not only expressed himself as being pleased but told me that his year at the hospital ends in July and that he, too, is going to the mountains *the first of August*. We have planned to make the trip together. Isn’t that perfect?

Of course, I shall write you very often during the next three months, for there are innumerable questions which I shall want to ask, and I shall also be-

gin at once to interest my many friends and the societies to which I belong in *our* cause.

But this is just to let you know that *I am coming*. Oh, I am so happy in the thought that Chance has placed in my hands this opportunity alike to be of service and 'prove myself'.

Enthusiastically yours,
MARGARET."

April the eleventh.

Donald laid Margaret's newly-arrived letter on his knees and looked up at his wife, who had been standing before him on the porch, as he read it, slowly. His expression was much like that depicted on the carven face of the Sphinx.

"Well?" she queried.

"I see that Margaret thought it necessary to put a special delivery stamp on it—not, of course, that it has done any harm or expedited its delivery at all," he observed, judicially.

"I'm not interested in your observations concerning the outside of the envelope," cried Rose, snatching it from his hand. "But I am in what's in the letter. Honestly and truly, what do you think?"

He waited a moment, and looked far off over the mountain slope to the west, now in deep purple shadow, and the still more distant sky where, beneath a bank of slate-gray clouds, the sun was sinking in angry colors.

"I think, 'honestly and truly,' that it is going to rain to-morrow. That wind . . ."

"Bother the wind. Of all the mean men!" Half-

laughing and wholly exasperated, Rose seized Donald by his broad shoulders and pretended to shake him. "It sounds exactly as though it had been written by a gushing boarding-school girl, now doesn't it?" she demanded.

"Oh, don't you think that you are doing a grave injustice—to the boarding-school, my dear?" he asked, adding, "But you mustn't be too hard on Margaret. She's really very bright and entertaining, and she will be very good company for the cripple during the ten days that she stays at Beaten."

"So you give her ten days?"

"Yes, I am generous by nature; I can't help it."

Rose seated herself on the broad arm of his chair and snuggled her hand into his. For a time she sat there, speechless, and at one moment he glanced up and thought that he saw a suggestion of tears in her eyes. At length she said, "I'm so disappointed, on Virgie's account, that I could almost cry, and I've half a mind to go this instant and write to her that I have changed my plans and that she is not to come."

"I wouldn't," answered Donald, quietly. "It will open her eyes to what life really is, and a thumping good failure may do her a world of good, in her after-life—besides she's going to pay her own expenses."

"So you're perfectly sure that she *will* fail?"

"Hmmm. Well, I'm a cautious man, naturally, and I won't go so far as to say that I'm *perfectly* sure. Still . . . well, Philip seems to be a man of rare discernment. I think I'll agree with him."

"The letter has terribly disappointed me," she said slowly. "But I don't believe that the Lord would have presented Margaret to us, as He seemed to do, especially to meet our need, unless He had really meant for her to be of service."

"And you still feel the same about Hunter?"

"Of course. Why, you haven't any doubts about him, have you?"

"I'm not sure. When we included him in our plan it was extremely simple; now it seems to be becoming pretty complex, and perhaps he won't fit in harmoniously—he's a peculiar chap and I imagine that a rather passionate nature is bottled up inside him. I had almost forgotten how touchy the mountain nature can be, when I suggested his coming."

"Well, we haven't asked him to join us indefinitely—as I did Margaret, thanks to my natural optimism. We can send him packing if necessary, for you and I can do without him. But we *need* her to help make good our promise to Virgil. Oh, hark!"

From the edge of the darkening wood came the plaintive, musical note of a whippoorwill.

"It's the first one I've heard this year. Wish, quick!" she cried.

There was a moment of silence. Then Rose said softly, "I'd spoil the charm if I told you my wish, dear. But it was pretty comprehensive, and I *am* sure that you are going to get well and that *she* is going to make good. Virgil's youthful vision must come true—some day!"

PART II
THE UNFOLDING

CHAPTER I

THE HOME-COMING

FOUR months had passed into the tomb of Time; four months crowded with events which had whirled around Rose as the never-ending waters of Defeated Creek eddied about one of its boulders. It had been her will which had worked the miracle that appeared before them, part way up the green hillside of Humpty Hite's perpendicular farm. Donald—bound to his cushioned chair, his fighting spirit chafing against the enforced restraint until at times he felt that he should go mad—had been her Agamemnon, the wise counselor. Camille had cheered her with her companionship and freed her hands to fight by taking almost exclusive care of Smiles, junior—a thing which was to the baby's adoring mother a blessing mixed with pain. Virgil had lent his enthusiastic aid, body and mind; Humpty Hite, his blind, patient services; Judd, his ever-critical help, for to him she was a petticoated Don Quixote tilting at windmills—not that he would have understood the allusion, of course. Others had labored, too, a few for love, more for a day's pay; but it was *her* will which had been the mainspring for it all.

At last the day had come when the first lap in the

long race had been covered. They had figuratively reached the first mile-stone and paused there, just as the jolt-wagon had literally paused after turning the last sharp twist in the rough road leading from their old home to their new. And their eyes were lifted unto the hills where the miracle stood.

Silently, her face shining with the light of pride with which the faintest shadow of a doubt was mingled, Rose turned to her silent husband. Would he commend her? For a moment Donald looked steadily up the steep ascent toward the spot where the two new houses, their home and the little school-hospital—joined to one another by a broad piazza, like two children hand-in-hand—stood out against the green background in the light relief of new pine clapboards. Even as he looked the descending sun struck upon first one window, then another, until they all seemed to gleam with friendly light.

Watching, Rose saw him turn his steady gaze to the left and let it rest for an instant upon the home of their nearest new neighbor—the tiny cabin which Camille had described,—its narrow doorway packed with half-frightened, half-curious, dirty and barely clad children.

“It’s a miracle!” His exclamation was her reward.

“Not of *my* performing,” answered Rose. “If you approve you have Judd and Virgie, Humpty Hite and Preacher Paul to thank.” Then she clasped his hand, held it tight and continued with a little catch in her voice. “I’m glad that you like it—

I knew you would—; but if you could only, *only* have been with us in body, as well as in spirit, and seen it grow! We had to fight for it, didn't we, Juddy? But the fun more than made up for the labor. Honestly, Don, men—and women, too—came from miles around to see the 'furrin houses' that had been made out in the United States and sent in here in pieces like a picture puzzle, and to watch us put it together."

"They done more'n that," supplemented Judd from his driver's seat. "They went all the way down tew the station at Fayville tew look at 'em. I don't reckon that we could have got 'em up hyar at all over thet thar creek road if their curiosity hadn't made 'em willing tew lend a hand. Guess Smiles told you abaout it."

"Yes. But I didn't dare to tell him how you stayed at Fayville yourself two nights to keep guard over them with a rifle. It might have worried you, Don."

"Good gracious, what was *that* for?" demanded the doctor.

"Oh, I dunno as hit war fer anything, only . . . well the people hyar-ababouts take funny notions, sometimes. Anyhaow we got 'em in after a while—all except the big timbers."

Donald nodded. "Yes, Rose told me that it was a physical impossibility to cart them around the twists and turns of *that* road, and I believe it."

"Well, I reckon we might hev, by blasting away a hundred or so cliffs or cuttin' the timbers in two—

which wouldn't have helped much. The ones we felled and hewed are just as good or better, though. Them houses are solid, even if they do look kind of perched up thar—like a couple of girls with their skirts too short fer 'em." He chuckled, and the baby gurgled as though in appreciation of his jest.

"They certainly did look that way at first," laughed Rose. "So we added those latticework flounces to hide their spindly legs. 'A plumb onnecessary foolishness, *I* calls hit,' Humpty Hite said, when we started to make them. You needn't grin, Judd, you called it a waste of money, yourself. Hite, at least, had the grace to say, 'hit *air* sorter purty,' when it was done."

"Now I guess that you're squelched, Judd," Donald interjected.

The other grinned, sheepishly. "Oh, hit's all mighty fine, I hain't denyin' that; but hit's too good fer this place and if Smiles is goin' tew live hyar she'd better get over her expensive, citified ideas. Puttin' money into these hyar maountings is like pourin' water into a sieve—when you're done hit's gone, and thar's nothin' tew show fer hit."

"I'm afraid you're a hopeless store-keeper, Judd," sighed Rose, half-humorously. "Don't you know that money isn't necessarily wasted just because you may not be able to see a stock of canned goods and calico in its place? This is all part of our plan to educate our mountain people in ideals of better living, as well as in the three R's. If we can set

good examples before them in every possible way—if only to create sufficient envy in their hearts to make them go and do likewise . . .”

“Hit won’t. I allaowed that your six years away from the maountings would make you forget, and hit has.”

“It hasn’t!” she flashed. “The trouble is with you. You lack vision and faith, Judd; but I’m going to put them into your heart, if I have to shoot them in with a rifle.”

“‘Go it, wife! Go it, bear’!” quoted Donald, keenly amused.

Judd shook his head. “Well, I know the value of money and what hit is tew be in debt. Naow, of course, I don’t know what them houses cost you—a good bit of money, I reckon, and probably as much more tew get ’em daown hyar by train and set up, and . . .”

“If you don’t stop crying ‘Economy’ and ‘it can’t be done,’ I’m going to change your name from Amos to ‘Calamity.’ And I’ll call you ‘Clammy,’ for short. You began when I told you that I meant to get an education and become a trained nurse, and now you’re at it again.”

“Well, I’ve got tew admit thet you done hit that other time, but then you were working on yourself, which was pretty good soil. Naow . . . well, I know us mountaineers, that’s all.”

“Hopeless! I mean that *you* are.” She abruptly changed her whimsical manner to deep seriousness

as she turned to her husband to say, in a distressed voice, "Is Judd right, Don? I know that we have been awfully extravagant. They do represent a good deal of money, and actually cost more than the original expense to get them here and built."

"I'm backing *you*," he answered, quietly. "As for the houses, they are material assets—'canned goods and calico'."

"Assets which would be unmarketable, I'm afraid."

"Well, then, they're 'home,' and the best is none too good. It's not much like the one I promised to build for you when we returned from France and settled down," he added, with a trace of bitterness in his voice.

"It's better, Donald—at least in *my* eyes. It's not only where my heart is—that would be equally true in Boston or Fijiland if you were there—but it is going to be a doorway of Opportunity for this adopted land of ours, I hope."

"So be it, then. All right, Judd. Let's go . . . home."

Judd jerked the reins and clucked to his team; but, before he could set them in motion, the head of another plodding mule, a huge, ungainly animal, appeared around the abrupt turn just behind them, heralded by the words, lustily chanted in the heavy voice of its unseen driver, "Dark clauds a-formin', hit's a-goin' tew rain; wagon heavy loaded, step on, 'Lizy Jane."

All of them turned in time to see the rickety con-

veyance swing into view. The single plank that made the seat was bent low beneath the weight of a mountainous man, fully as large as Grandpap Webb had been. His bulky form was clad in denim overalls, frayed and patched, and a coal-blackened blue shirt, from the open neck of which rose a massive head. His muscular jaws were black with stubbly beard and the corners of his broad mouth brown with tobacco juice; rather small eyes were set deeply under shaggy, protruding eyebrows, a blue scar ran partway across one cheek and the whole sullen countenance was crowned with matted black hair, faintly penciled in gray.

"It's 'Bad Bill' Cress, isn't it, Judd?" inquired Rose in an undertone.

He nodded, as he drew his team close to the bank so that the other might pass, with the off-wheels of his vehicle in the creek bed and its body tipped at a precarious angle, and answered, "Yes. One of your new neighbors. Do you reckon he'll enter the door of Opportunity?"

"Good-evening, Mr. Cress," she called brightly, and Judd added the customary invitation, "Better get daown and come in, Bill."

With unchanging expression the mountaineer regarded the strange wagonload, expectorated and replied, "Reckon I'll be gittin' along. Git-up, 'Lize."

"Glad to see us, wasn't he?" remarked Donald with the old fighting expression settling around his own mouth. "'Bad Bill'—well, he looks the part, which is more than ~~is~~ true of most villians."

Judd nodded again, "Outlaw for six years—lived in a cave on the maounting behind your place. Still moonshiner and rifle-toter. Never been caught, although everybody knows hit and that he's killed two men. The sheriffs git kinder blind when they're out lookin' fer Bill, whatever."

"I suppose that you'll have made him your sworn friend and ally in a week or two, Rose." Her husband smiled, but grimly.

"Of course, at least if I get an opportunity to, and trying counts. We'd better have him for a friend than an enemy, hadn't we, Don?"

"I reckon," Judd answered with feeling and added "Goin' tew convert him, too? Obie Fugate ses that hit's scandiculous the way he carries on and Preacher Paul that he has 'a hard heart and a reprobated mind'."

"Certainly I'm going to win him, if I can."

"I believe that you'd tackle the devil himself," her husband put in, and she retorted, "Wouldn't you?"

"Hmmm. Well I'd just as lief not meet him until my appointed time comes. I'm not as full of fight as I was once."

He glanced at Judd and the mountain man smiled in recollection.

Rose's protest was interrupted by a cry from Camille. "Oh, look, *Souris*! Isn't it the Mr. Virgil?" She pointed up the creek toward a youth approaching them on a galloping horse, which he rode with the ease and grace of a cowboy.

"My, how sharp some people's eyes are growing," mocked Donald. The girl flushed slightly.

"Well, it looks as though we are going to be greeted at the gate, even if your friend 'Bad Bill' has refused the invitation to act as a committee of one to welcome us home."

Virgil had already vaulted from his horse at the entrance to the path which wound up the mountain-side, tossed his bridle carelessly over one of the fence palings, and swung wide the broad gate. A happy smile illuminated his manly young face.

"A second piece of foolishness—according to Judd," remarked Rose, pointing to the two tall posts and elevated cross pieces which formed a rustic gateway.

"Where is your sense of the artistic?" demanded her husband, humorously, and then cried, "Whoa!" as his gaze rested on a sign nailed high on one of the posts. New white letters on a background of dark green spelled the words:

"Smiling Pass Come in, Friend."

For a moment he studied the inscription, silently. Then he turned to Rose with a look of quiet pleasure in his gray eyes.

"You think it's a happy thought, Don?" was her eager question and he answered, "It is like you, dear."

"Only I didn't do it—at least not the 'Smiling Pass' part. It was altogether Camille's idea."

Flushing still the more, the girl bent her head. Then she looked up quickly, a distressed appeal in her big eyes. "But I . . . I just could not live in a place called 'Beaten,' Donald. You understand, is it not so?"

"Yes, I understand, *ma petite*."

She brightened as she went on, "Of course the new home had to be named for *Souris*, some way, and she told me that this is a pass between the mountains."

"And is to be a pass for its people from shadow to sunshine, God willing," added Rose.

"There is your motto, ready made: 'SMILING PASS, From Shadow to Sunshine'. I believe that it has always been your heart's motto, my child."

The final expression was Donald's supreme term of endearment, save on rare occasions when they were alone, and his wife thanked him with the smile which meant far more to him than any words.

"I hope so," she said. "It really was Camille's suggestion, but it has given me an idea, too."

"An idea? *You?*" Donald spoke lightly in a man-like endeavor to cover up his deeper feelings.

"Yes. Impossible as it may appear even I have one occasionally. Do you want to hear it? The only fee that we shall charge at our hospital shall be a— a smile, paid on departing. And when we get the school started the children shall pay their tuition

daily in the same bright currency. And we will have a boy's club where all shall be Knights of the Smile and it shall be their grip and password combined, and . . ."

"Wait! If you keep on you'll have the millenium arriving about the middle of next week," exclaimed Donald, while Judd shook his head, despairingly.

"Yes, I suppose that I am an enthusiastic little goose, but I can no more help planning pleasant things than I can help . . ."

"Smiling, perhaps?"

"Don't, Don. That's mean. Honestly, I've sometimes reached the point where I vowed that I should shriek and throw things at the very next person who called me by that foolish nick-name; but now I mean to resign myself to it, 'for ever 'n' ever, amen,' and work it for all it is worth—the *name*, I mean, not the facial contortion." Whereupon her lips instantly belied her words.

Donald chuckled, and responded to his wife's demand for an explanation of his mirth by saying, "I was just wondering how Hunter is going to get across the threshold. I don't believe that he ever smiled in his life."

"Why, he *does* smile, too. Perhaps not often with his *lips*, but with his eyes. There is almost always one in them, I noticed."

"So?" The man relapsed into silence, but its possible significance was lost on Rose, who had turned in answer to Virgil's greeting, and was thanking him for anticipating their homecoming.

Camille, after acknowledging the young man's "*Bon soir, mademoiselle,*" had apparently centered her whole attention upon the baby.

The horse and mule turned in at the gateway and, straining against the harness, pulled the cumbersome wagon up the ascent to the foot of the flight of steps to "home." Donald eyed it with painful expectations, but when Judd and Virgil had aided him to alight and adjust his crutches, Rose led him by a gently-rising pathway, which her forethought had provided, to where the back of the new house snuggled against the mountainside. There she opened a door and lightly saluted her husband's cheek with a kiss of welcome as he stepped inside, followed by the rest.

"Well, well. How bright and cheerful it is! How can the people here live their lives without windows and sunshine?" he exclaimed, as he paused to let his searching gaze enter in turn the several small but cheerful rooms opening off the hallway.

"Smiles!"

His further exclamation was occasioned by the sight of the nearest one, which was furnished as a combination office and living room. Unbelieving, he closed his eyes for an instant; then looked again. For, save for its plaster-board walls and ceiling and its plain pine floor, it was his old study of the long-ago Boston days! The same time-marred furniture stood there, arranged as of yore; the same cherished engravings graced the wall; the same

bookcases sat on either side of the quarry-stone fireplace and bore the same well-thumbed volumes; the old trophies of college days and of vacation hunts decorated the plain mantelpiece; there was his favorite Morris chair, with extra cushions inviting him to rest within their comforting depths.

For a moment the man's heart was too full of gratitude toward the one whose loving thoughtfulness had been responsible for it all for him to utter a word. He swung himself to the chair and lowered his big form slowly into it. Rose moved to his side and seated herself on the broad arm, whereupon *his* arm encircled her. Camille, still carrying the baby, led the other two silent men on a tour of inspection through the rest of the little house, every stick of which they knew, every piece of furniture in which they had set in place.

"Yes," said Donald, at last. "It *is* home."

CHAPTER II

INCIDENTS ENDING IN A "HOUSEWARMIN' "

"THERE, there dear, don't tremble any more. It's all over now, and you're been wonderfully brave. Listen to me, Versie. I've seen hundreds and hundreds of brave soldiers, and brave children, too, over in France during the Great War, but never one with more courage than you have had. Will you tell your pappy that, for 'Nurse Smiles'? "

The ten-year-old girl who was sobbing within her comforting arms gulped an assent.

"And you'll promise to come to our school, as soon as it begins and your eyes are all well? And bring Verta with you?"

"I . . . I reckon I will, ma'am."

"Good. Now Omie shall lead you home, by the hand, just as though you were really blind, instead of a little girl who is soon going to see the birds and the flowers and the trees . . ."

"And mammy and pappy?"

"Yes, and mammy and pappy, far better than she ever has in her whole life. And remember, you're not to take the bandage off until I come, tomorrow."

"Yes'm. Thank you . . . and the doctor feller, fer doin' hit," the child mumbled indistinctly.

"That's all right, dear. We want to help all the children here."

"And don't forget to tell your brother that his glasses have arrived from the city, and that he is to come up here and get them this evening," reminded Donald.

Virgil's sister, now transformed by a modern middy blouse with flowing tie and a becoming blue skirt, beneath which appeared shapely feet and ankles clad in tan—as sweet and dainty a fifteen-year-old girl as there was in all America—, took the blind-folded child by the hand and led her out of the room.

"Whew," said Donald. "She certainly *did* have nerve, that kid. I must have half-killed her. Well, live and learn. I never expected to sit in a pillowed chair and perform an operation for trachoma."

"Naturally not," responded his wife, now, as she had back in her own childhood vowed to be some day, his special nurse. And she continued, while she deftly cleaned the instruments with which he had removed the cicatrization whose hard granules had, for years, been literally and painfully scraping away the sight from the eyeballs, "You wouldn't naturally expect to have a patient utterly refuse to receive an anesthetic for a reason like *that*."

Donald laughed, "So her pappy was afraid that if we 'put her to sleep' we would steal her soul from her, was he? And the poor kid had to endure all that pain, needlessly."

"It's maddening, isn't it?"

"It sure is—the whole problem is. You and Virgil and Margaret can dream away about making a race of moral and intellectual giants; *I* am having nightmares over saving 'red, sore eyes'—as they call 'em. Heavens! I never knew what a hold trachoma had on this section, and we're in the very center of its grip. Listen to this." He reached out, took an opened pamphlet from the table beside him and read, "'In the seven counties surveyed'—this was by Stucky, back in 1910," he interpolated—" '3,974 persons were examined, 500 of whom, or twelve and one-half per cent were found to be suffering from trachoma'." He ran his eye further down the page and read again, "'Along one creek, taken at random, there were sixteen cases . . . in ten consecutive homes'—bet it was *this* creek. How in the deuce it ever got in here at all is a mystery, for the disease was imported from Europe. Let's see, they say something about that." He turned back a page and read, "'The mountain people are not given to travelling about; they live by themselves, as they have for years, in little homes scattered over every range, rarely so grouped as to form even a small settlement, and almost shut out from the world at large. . . . They are not at all the 'poor whites' of the South, but are a keen, bold breed of men, remnants of Revolutionary days, real Americans, half a million of them, but many of them in a state of arrested civilization'."

"Good!" Rose interrupted. "Virgil should see that."

"It goes on to describe the customs, which you know . . . Wait, this is put tersely: 'Off in the wilds, far from the beaten trails, log cabins are found up and down the creeks, and in these little homes, frequently consisting of but a single room, sometimes even without a window, the entire family, numbering from five to fifteen, will live, eat and sleep. Could a more fertile field be found for the propagation of contagious or infectious diseases?' Answer; it could *not*. 'The pathos and tragedy of the conditions of the natives of the mountains are that if they are to receive help it must be carried to them, as they are practically mountain-locked.' Wait you'll like this. 'In the regeneration—*sure to come*—of this section, so vastly wealthy in minerals and forest products, a gradual education of the people themselves will be accomplished'—it's printed in the book and must be so," he interpolated—" 'which will surely lead to an understanding of preventive measures.' A nice task for your leaders-to-be."

"And one that they are going to be taught to meet," she answered. "We've already made a tiny start along that one line; I'm sure that I can see a little change, even in this single month. If we were only going to stick to helping heal their bodily diseases I'm certain that all would go smoothly enough, but when Margaret arrives . . . "

"If she ever does! How many times has she postponed her start already?"

"You're mean, Donald. Dr. Hunter couldn't get

away when he expected to, and I don't blame her for not wanting to make the trip alone. What I started to say was, when she and Virgil begin to overturn our neighbors' children's every habit of thought and life I don't know *what's* going to happen. Their parents may be driving us out at the point of a gun, like . . ."

"Nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense, Don. When will you learn that every other mountaineer is a powder mine, with fuse timed to explode in half a second? Well, the first step is always a long way on the road, and we've been lucky, so far—perhaps that's tempting Fate, as Humpty Hite says it is to declare that you're feeling splendidly. You know that his answer to 'How are you?' is always 'Jest ord'nary' when it isn't, 'I haint doin' very good'."

"Give the Lord the credit and I guess you'll be safe," replied her husband. "It certainly looks as though He sent the plague to help us, as he did to help the Children of Israel out of Egypt."

"Don't be sacrilegious, Donald."

"I'm not, I'm sincere. What would we be doing if He hadn't sent Mrs. Gayheart and little Omie to cook for and take care of our well being, generally? And where on the face of the 'Beaten' earth would we have found a place to put them if He hadn't—well let us say 'permitted' the flu to remove the entire Zenas Tittle family at the psychological moment so that we could get hold of a not-half-bad double

cabin just across the creek? Besides, you can't help but agree that the Tittles are better off in Heaven than they would have been here."

"I suppose so—poor creatures. She was going to have another baby, too. It sounds utterly heartless but I have almost prayed that she might die and *it* be spared the journey to this earth. What a crime it is against society to allow people as diseased in body and mind as they to marry and have offspring!"

"Double first cousins, weren't they?"

"Of course. Half the people on this creek are, and the children of cousins, as well. You can't throw a stone at random without hitting a Tittle or a Tent."

"I know. How do you expect to get any results with material like that?"

"It's been worrying me a lot, Don. Of course, Margaret is coming here without knowing the real conditions and Virgie has the blind enthusiasm of youth. But *we* know that eugenic laws are as immutable as those of the 'Peeds and the Mersians'—as Preacher Paul says. You've got to help, Don. What shall we do to start this visionary scheme with its feet on the ground? I'm really getting frightened. I've made an awful lot of wild pledges."

"So, you're beginning to realize it? Judd . . . "

"Darn Judd," cried the woman petulantly. "Half of my promises are the result of his pessimism. When he says, 'You can't,' I swear that *I will*."

"Well, anyway I'm glad that you asked that question, for I've been doing some thinking—I'm good

for nothing else, now," he added, with the bitter note still more pronounced. She would have contradicted him, but he continued with, "If you're going ahead with this plan it can't be on a hit or miss basis. That would be as absurd a waste of energy as occurs in the average settlement school—according to Virgil's contention. You mentioned eugenic laws. There's your starting point. I believe that we shouldn't take a child, even for the month's trial that you have planned, until we have first got his or her pedigree,—like a horse's or a dog's. If there's any material in-breeding shown by it, turn 'em down. Mistakes will occur, of course, but fewer than if you take 'em as they come."

"It sounds scientific—and heartless," she answered, with marked hesitation.

"Exactly. But if I understand Margaret's wonderful plan as elaborately outlined in her last epistle, this is to be a Citizenship and Community leaders' training proposition, not an eleemosynary institution. Like the Creator, you've got to deal with big principles; individuals only incidentally."

"I suppose so. But . . . oh, dear, I know that I'm going to be soft-hearted, just as Judd says. I'll try to let reason—meaning you, sir—govern that unruly member, but I've already set my heart on Euphemy Fugate's Linzie for one of our boys. He's adorable and as bright a child as ever I knew."

"And he's outside the pale erected by my suggestion?"

"No, I don't think so. But . . . but he's illegitimate, Don," Rose replied, softly.

"What's that got to do with it? Love babies may be generally branded at birth in the eyes of an idiotic and censorious world—as though it were *their* fault—but they're often the best possible citizenship material. Take him, of course. Perhaps he has the making of an Alexander Hamilton, who knows?"

They were interrupted by the sound of an uncertain step upon the porch, a knock at the door. "Come in," called Rose and an instant later a boy of sixteen, clad in ragged shirt and overalls, entered the room and stood with the irresolution alike of blindness and timidity. His body was thin through undernourishment, his face showed the pallor and hollows of anemia, and his eyelids, thickened and almost closed to shut out the painful light, were red and watery.

"Oh, hello, Desty. So Versie told you that your glasses had come?" was Donald's greeting.

"Hit's so," the lad replied in a spiritless voice. "I don't reckon they're going tew do me no good, whatever."

"Well, we'll see—I hope the words have a double meaning," said the woman. "How do your eyes feel since our last treatment?"

"They haint doin' so bad, ma'am."

"Then that's good." While speaking she had gone to the desk and taken from their case a pair of shiny-rimmed spectacles. "Come over here

to the window, where I can try these on." The boy obeyed, listlessly. "Look down towards the creek. What do you see?" she asked.

"Kaint see nothin', no haow—yes I kin too. Thar's someone movin' up the hill; leastwise, I reckon I kin see someone movin'."

A deeply interested spectator, Donald glanced past them through the window and saw Omie Everage swinging blithely up the path only a hundred feet distant. And the boy *thought* that he could see someone moving; this pitiable lad whose whole world was merely a thing of torturing light and shadowy forms, recognizable as people or inanimate objects only when his hands could almost touch them; whose elder brothers and father, likewise afflicted with the wasting disease, were now pigmy figures high up on the mountainside, patiently cultivating a corn field—as they had earlier plowed and planted it—by kicking their way along through the furrows which they could not see; whose grandfather now sat in the sunlight, yet in darkness, before their cabin, patiently picking away the hours, the days, the years, on the strings of his old fiddle. Decaying age, blighted manhood, doomed youth, unless . . .

He looked back at the boy, over whose tightly shut eyes Rose was now adjusting the new spectacles.

"Look . . . and see," she commanded, softly.

For a moment Desty remained with eyes closed. Then he slowly forced them open. He uttered a sharp cry, tore off the glasses, turned, fled to the

opposite corner of the room and pressed himself into it, trembling.

"Oh, my boy! What is it? Did the light hurt?" cried Rose, as she ran to his side and placed her arm about his shoulders.

"Taint thet. But, my Gawd, what's them things daown tew the creek, thar?"

"What things? There's nothing strange there. Just an old cow—your own cow, Desty—and some chickens and hogs. Yes, and Omie climbing the path. Come, put the glasses on again and we'll go back and look, together."

After much urging he unwillingly obeyed. For some time he stood at the window, speechless. His expression was first amazement, then eagerness. Finally he spoke. "My Gawd, I kin *see*. I haint never seed before. I . . . I reckon I'll go home and see mammy and pappy."

"Go home, son," said Donald, gently. Rose could not speak. Her throat was too full of tears.

An hour later Virgil came in, late to supper after a ride up the creek. "Did you happen to see Desty, rejoicing in his new 'specs', and vision?" Donald inquired.

"Yes, I stopped to speak to him a minute. When I got to Tobias Tittle's place Desty was alternately feeling of the different parts that he had seen mostly through his fingers, putting his glasses on for a moment to see what they really looked like, and then snatching them off again."

"Oh, the poor boy!" Camille's exclamation of pity preceded Rose's question, "But what on earth was he taking them off for? Why isn't he wearing them?"

Virgil seemed loath to answer for some reason and she repeated her demand.

"I don't reckon that he's going to, Rose," he said, slowly. "It seems that that old preaching fool, 'Stammerin' Sam', has been talking to him already. Told him that getting glasses was going against the Lord's will—that He gave the people the kind of eyes He meant them to have, and that if he wore specs he'd become tee-totally blind. Guess Desty believes it, for he took one look at me through them, and put them away in his pocket as though he were scared to death."

Donald's fist crashed down on the table. On his countenance was a look of anger such as his wife had seen there only once before in her life. It frightened her.

"And they call that damnable heathenish superstition 'religion'!" he growled through clinched teeth.

"Hush, hush, Donald. Only a very few are like that, thank God. It's heart-breaking, but we're going to change it somehow, some day. I feel exactly as you do, but let's not talk about it any more now. That's the dark side of the situation; the bright one is that Margaret and Dr. Hunter will be here in a very few days and we can begin work in earnest—

oh, dear, if we only had money enough to put up the buildings that we're going to need at the very start."

"But isn't it nice that 'Uncle' Phil is coming with them, for his vacation, *Souris*?" said Camille, eager to lend her aid in changing the trend of thought.

"'Nice' is too mild a word, dear. What a wonderful time you'll have initiating him into the mysteries of the mountains' life! He'll love it; especially with this particular guide," she added, significantly.

Virgil's eyes were fixed on his plate and his countenance set and expressionless.

"*Pourquoi non*. Is he not my uncle, then?"

Rose laughed, lightly, and turned with a mischievous look towards Donald. "And you, sir! Perhaps you remember what you said about Margaret being entertaining company for you, during the 'ten days' which you give her to stick it out?"

"Which seems to leave the third new-comer all to you," he responded, with a smile.

"Of course. I mean to set him to work the instant that he arrives. You know what your pamphlet said: 'If these mountaineers are to receive medical help it must be carried to them.' Oh, how I wish that it might be by *you*, but at least they will have one able doctor riding his horse over the hills, with a humble nurse tagging along at his heels on muleback."

"And how do you know that I will surrender my own special nurse to him?" Donald challenged, his face still wearing its smile, however.

"Of course you will, when she is needed. It's an unbreakable rule of the most noble fraternity of physicians," she said, and he answered a bit rebelliously, "Yes, I suppose that it is. We have no right to personal desires."

"Donald, I don't like to hear you speak cynically, dear."

"Well, I'll try to be good. Guess I'm getting old—and selfish."

"Nonsense. Oh, we'll have a party for them, too—a belated house-warming and invite all the world and his wife. Almost none of the neighbors have called on us yet," she added, rather plaintively.

"And I guess they're not likely to," growled her husband.

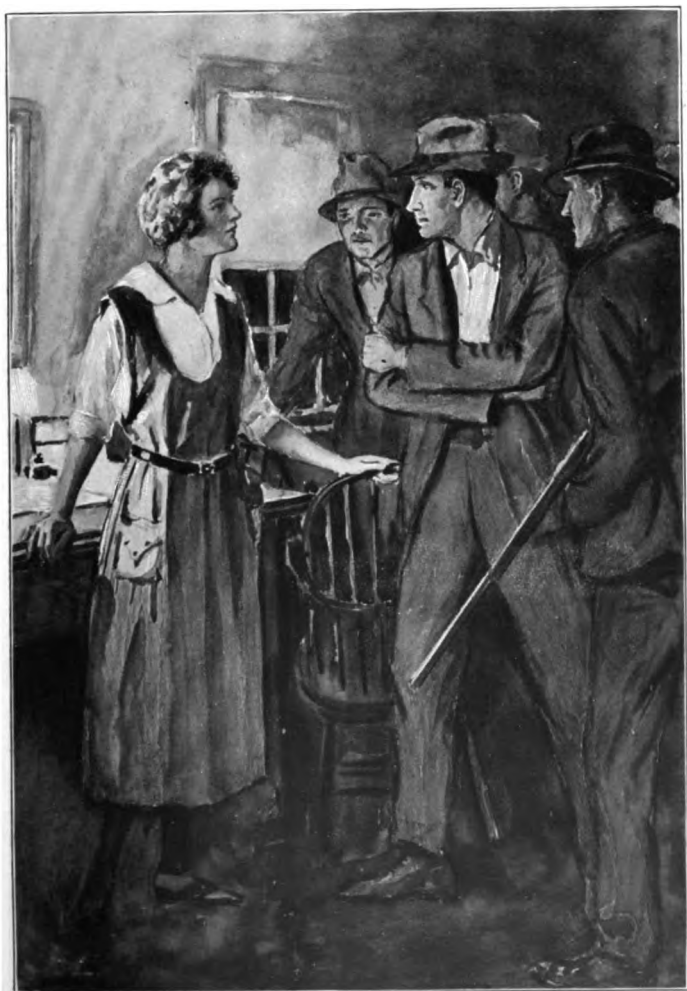
"They'll come; some day; you wait and . . ."

Her sentence was temporarily interrupted by the noise of a heavy knock on the porch door, and she changed its ending to, "Maybe that's a delegation of welcome this very minute."

"It certainly looks something like it," Virgil called back from the hallway as he went to answer the summons. A moment, filled with the sound of heavy boots clumping in, followed. Then he reappeared, rather startled of countenance. "Some of the men from round about want to see you," he said, nodding toward Rose. "It . . . it looks a little like trouble. Shall I tell them . . ."

"Tell them that I'll be right there."

"No, I'll go," declared Donald, pushing his chair



" ROSE STOOD BEFORE THE DESK, FACING . . . A PARTY
OF SIX OR SEVEN TALL MOUNTAINEERS "

away from the table and starting to get up. But his wife was already on her feet and she pressed him back, her hands on his shoulders. "Sit still, Don. Of course there's no danger. I *want* to see them."

Undetermined what the best course to pursue was, Donald remained with the rest, silent and anxious, for a few moments, during which the voices from his study—men's voices which sounded gruff and unfriendly—came to them down the hallway.

At length he could stand it no longer. He pulled himself to his feet with a jerk which sent red-hot stabs of anguish through his thigh, grasped Virgil's sleeve and, half-supported by him, limped painfully to the door of his office, followed by the girls. Rose stood before the desk, facing him and likewise a party of six or seven tall mountaineers, whose very backs looked hostile and sullen. Among them he recognized "Bad Bill" Cress and the fanatical preacher, "Stammerin' Sam." Several of the men carried rifles held in careless positions by sinewy, toil-hardened hands.

"Go and get my revolver," he whispered to Virgil, hoarsely, as he transferred his supporting hand from the youth's arm to the door casing.

"No!" Virgil's voice was also tense.

Rose was speaking. Her voice was perfectly controlled and low, but two red spots burned on her cheeks and her eyes were flashing angrily. "I've told you that, before, Preacher Sam. We're *not* missionaries. We haven't the slightest intention of

trying to influence the children in what *you* would call religious matters. To *me* it is a big part of real religion to see to it that the little ones grow up to have bodies and minds that are strong and clean. God gave them those, as well as souls—although some of you here seem to forget that fact, or don't think that He cares how things go on this earth, His footstool, so long as the soul gets to Heaven. Let me help save their bodies, train their minds and help form their moral life on earth, and I'll promise to leave their souls to you."

There was a touch of subtle sarcasm in her voice which was not lost on Donald and Virgil, but was on her other listeners.

"All we hope to do is to help them, help all of you, if you'll let us, make first Beaten, and then, with their aid, all of our mountains, a better place to live in and all the mountaineers—I'm one myself—better people to live in them; better in body and mind, I mean.

"Oh, you needn't pull back your coat like that, Billy. I can see that revolver in your belt now, and it doesn't frighten me a particle."

Donald thrilled and Virgil whispered, "Bully for her . . . our Joan of the Mountains."

"Well, I don't reckon hit dew, gal," responded Bill as he turned to the others with a somewhat sheepish grin. "I knowed your grandpappy and respected him—he war a fine rifle shot. I reckon you *air* maounting, at heart, and we-all haint much skeered

on your account, whatever. What you've said is good enough fer me. But what abaout them others? We kaint sorter figer which way Virgie's aimin', and we don't take up much with furriners and fur-rin' idees."

"And we-all air aimin' tew see thet they don't make no mischief, hyarabouts, thet's all," broke in another.

"You needn't threaten," she flashed. "I've told you where I stand, and I pledge myself for the others. Friends . . ." she added, her voice taking on an appealing tone. "I love these mountains; I was raised here. I love the mountain people, too. Do you reckon I'm aiming to do anything that isn't right? Or that my husband and friends would?

"Come in, Donald," she called, beckoning to him. "Come in and meet some of our friends and neighbors—who are going to help us make these hills part of America, again."

CHAPTER III

PROMISES

"I've got to run over and dress Aunt Lissy's leg, Donnie, dear," announced Rose, appearing with the baby in the door of the combination office-living room in "The House of Happiness." "I may make another professional visit or two, but I'll hurry back. Of course I must be home when Phil, Margaret and Dr. Hunter arrive. Just to think that they will actually be here tonight! We got the cot beds for the men to bunk on in the hospital just in time, didn't we?"

"Yes. I'll be glad to see them, too. Who's going to play nurse for Junie while you're gone?"

"Well, Camille is busy with the class in domestic science which she's already started among the older girls—at present it consists mainly in having them scrub and clean; but she's going to be a wonderful help when we can start training courses in weaving, too. She learned that in the Convent, you know. Omie is with her, so I reckon that *you* are."

"Thought so. Well, the nurse is willing. Hand her over."

He held out his muscular arms to receive his adored daughter, who wiggled in mid-air with babyish delight.

"I'll get the wonderful pen that Virgie made for her, and put it close to your chair, so that you can reach her," said his wife. "What a dear that boy is. He'll make a perfect 'pappy,' some day," she went on as she brought it.

"Right. A good son usually does, and he's that. I liked the boy the first moment I saw him, but the way he spoke of his mother when he brought her here settled the matter."

"It *was* lovely; but why shouldn't he have said it? Of course, she's unpolished—mountain timber in the rough, but, like it, fine and sound to the heart. I love her."

"Yes. She's great. But in this present age of the world too many youths—and maidens as well—, when they become educated a bit above their family's station in life, are superciliously ashamed of their parents; more shame to them."

"I like the way in which you call him 'son', Don. And so does he," remarked Rose.

"Perhaps he will be that some day. How would you like the idea of a son-in-law only six years younger than yourself?"

His wife laughed. "Good gracious, do you think that he has designs on Junie already, and would be willing to wait all those years?"

"Well, hardly. But we've more than once threatened to adopt Camille legally, you know. And he . . ."

"He does nothing of the sort. They're just like

brother and sister. Besides, knowing what a wonderful girl she really is, and how dear Philip is, too, I can't help hoping a tiny bit . . ."

"Oh, I know your nefarious schemes; but they are just like uncle and niece," he mocked. "One fictitious relationship would count no more than the other, if the real call should come."

"Well, I'm not contemplating any intrigues in *that* direction, anyway. It's too dangerous a business, and we've enough of that kind on hand, as it is. Good-bye, man of wrath and angel child."

She kissed them both, tenderly, and ran gaily out of the room. With a smile on his strong face Donald watched her go. Was it possible that she was really grown up, a wife—*his* wife—and a mother? Her graceful form seemed scarcely more mature than on the evening when he had first seen her, standing barefoot before the fireplace in Big Jerry's cabin; her face was as fair, her complexion as clear as then. Only her eyes and mouth had altered—from those of a care-free child to a woman who had known love—and pain. Donald glanced down at his own almost helpless body and the smile faded. How unfair it was for her, in her vigorous prime, to be tied to a cripple!

His eyes traveled to the wall over his desk where were tacked two cards bearing little mottoes, devised by Rose and neatly lettered by Camille. The first ran:

"HAPPINESS IS BORN OF HELPFULNESS;"

The second:

"SMILING PASS. From Shadow to Sunshine.

Serve always
acrifice when needs be
ave the helpless
AND
mile!"

He sighed.

The sound of heavy footsteps in the little hallway caused him to turn just as Judd entered the room, followed by a keen-visaged man, dressed in town clothes with the addition of leather leggings, which indicated that he had ridden thither on horseback.

"Whar's Smiles, Don? Gone aout? Pshaw, thet's too bad. This gentleman is lawyer Combs from daown in Fayville—Dr. MacDonald." As the two clasped hands Judd continued. "John Combs is the feller that incorporated your Community Center, and he's also brung up the deed that she asked me to get drawed. Hite'll back daown on hit at the last minute though—see if he don't. And I hopes he does. I say naow, as I've said a hundred times before, paying a thousand dollars for this worn-aout track of maountingside is plumb throwin' money intew quicksand."

"We're not buying property as such, merely, old man," smiled the other, "It's for a cause. Rose insists that I'm paying that to the mountains—and their future generations of dwellers—as the price of health which the hills are to restore to me."

"The which they haint done yet, whatever!"

"Well, she feels certain that I'm going to collect some day, and I'm willing to humor her, although it about cleans out the exchequer."

"You've done nothin' *but* humor her from the start," exclaimed the mountaineer.

Donald merely continued to smile, tolerantly, and their caller broke into the conversation to explain the conditions in the deed which he had prepared. Donald found the man of law, with his anecdotes of the County Court, such entertaining company that he insisted upon his remaining for nearly two hours. Finally Mr. Combs put his oft-repeated declaration that he must be starting into action to the extent of rising, whereupon Judd kicked him none too gently on the ankle, and grimaced meaningly when he looked around.

"Oh, yes. I almost forgot one other thing," said the lawyer, as he fished another paper out of his pocket. "I guess you knew that Amos' brother, and nephew have been evading the long arm of the law for pretty nearly a year."

Donald nodded.

"Well, I've finally fixed it up so that they can return home upon the filing of a bond, in the penal sum of a thousand dollars each, to keep the peace. Judd wants to get them located here—says he'll give Bud a job tending the new store, and he wants to get Malvary in your school, when it starts; he'll vouch for their good behavior."

"Good Lord, do you mean to tell me that a serious

charge like the one against them will be dropped as informally as that, here?"

"Sure. The Court'll take bonds for almost anything—even straight murder. And a bond doesn't amount to much more than a scrap of paper, for that matter. We mountaineers may have a peculiar code of honor in some respects, but one next to never jumps bail and, when he does, the Court takes action against the sureties more seldom still. It's a matter of form. Judd's going on the bond himself, and wanted me to ask you—the corporation, I mean—to do the same."

"Could it?" Donald demanded.

"Yes." The lawyer grinned. "I put that in the articles of agreement. Charitable institutions frequently do, here."

"Hmmm. Well, I don't know. Of course I'd like to oblige Judd, but . . ."

"There's no 'but' about it." Rose, who had heard the last of the conversation from the doorway, now spoke positively as she came forward. "Of course we'll do it! It's one way of proving to men like Bud and boys like Mally the sincerity of our purpose to help our neighbors in every possible way towards better lives, even if there were the danger of being held liable. But I'll trust Judd to keep his promise and Mr. Combs to keep us out of trouble, if anything *should* go wrong."

"Shame on you; conniving at the avoidance of a legal obligation," laughed her husband. "Well, gentlemen, there you are. The Big Chief has spoken

—although I suppose that Judd would say that I shouldn't humor her. Since we're incorporated I suppose that the directors will have to vote on the matter, however, and Virgil . . ."

"I don't guess that he'll be agreeable," Judd broke in, rather sullenly and Rose flashed back, "You don't know Virgie, then. All the narrowness and family feud instinct were wiped out of his nature when he was in the army. You may laugh at his 'Vision' as I call it; but you'll find it will hold true in a matter like this one. And I wish from the bottom of my heart, Judd, that you'd try harder to put away your own veiled animosity. We *must* all pull together if we're going to put this big thing over, and if you're to be general manager you've got to pull with every single member of the team."

"'Haint the individual nor the army as a whole,
But the everlastin' teamwork o' every bloomin'
soul', " quoted Donald.

Judd did not answer, but he looked a little ashamed, and Rose was wise enough to drop the subject.

"Oh, did you bring the deed, Mr. Combs?" she asked eagerly. "There's Humpty Hite, like Gunga Din, carrying water now, and he can get his wife in a minute."

The lawyer pointed to the instrument which Donald had laid on his desk, and the latter humorously reached for his checkbook and proceeded to reduce the slender balance appearing therein by a thousand dollars.

A few moments later a little group stood solemnly in the widespread shade of the giant sycamore tree beside "The House of Happiness." Virgil only was missing—he was on his way back from Fayville with the three newcomers, pressing his team steadily, for the clouds, hanging low above the mountain-tops, had already sent down one brief deluge of rain and momentarily threatened another. But there was a blaze of temporary sunlight flooding the hillside at Smiling Pass, and its freshly washed forest backed the group like a great green tapestry hung down from heaven.

There stood the burden-bowed man, who was about to sell his fifty-acre homestead; his weary wife—toil-worn and pitiable like himself—Rose, Judd, Camille and Omie, and a few of the curious children at a respectful distance. Donald was above them on the veranda leaning heavily upon his crutches.

With patient effort Humpty Hite affixed his uncertain signature at the bottom of the deed—between his trips for wood, coal and water during the past few weeks Rose had taught him to write that much. The scrawling letters seemed somehow to typify the man—twisted they were, and filled with the pain of their making, yet they stood as the beginning of better things; education, and all the unfolding life that it would bring. His wife, still in the full shadow, took the pen in trembling fingers and made her cross—another symbol.

"That's fine, Humpty; I'm proud of you," said

Rose, as he passed the paper back to her. "And *you* have the right to feel very proud today. You can write your name and, besides, you are the father of all the work which we are doing—and the greater work to be, which is some day to help every man, woman and child hereabouts to learn how to read and write and live clean, healthy and happy lives. And here is your check—a whole thousand dollars, Humpty."

His gnarled, stiffened fingers took the oblong piece of paper which she held out to him. For an instant he looked blankly at it, the transfiguring illumination fading slowly from his face. Tears came into his weak blue eyes.

Suddenly he fell to his knees on the turf and lifted his arms above his head. "Gawd!" he wailed. "I hev give up the land of my fathers. I hev writ my name and deeded hit away—fer nothin'! A little piece of paper; the land of my fathers!"

"No, no, Hite!" cried the woman, her own eyes brimming. "It's money—a whole thousand dollars. You can take it tomorrow to the bank at Fayville and get real silver dollars for it, if you wish. Truly you can."

He slowly got to his feet, a look of childish shame on his countenance. "Maybe I kin. I trusts your word; but I haint never hed nothin' like *this* afore. But ef hit *air* so—and I haint doubtin' hit—a thousand dollars haint filled with no meanin' tew me. Please, ma'am; you-all take thet 'a thousand dollars' and

fer hit git me more land, fer me and my children tew set on."

"Oh, we will. I promise it, Humpty," cried Rose. "We'll buy another farm somewhere right near here and 'riz' you a new home on it, not like your old cabin, but a real *dwelling* like The House of Happiness. You can pay for it in something better than money . . ."

"I allaows you means 'work,' ma'am."

"Yes."

"I'll do hit. I'll work my fingers tew the bone fer ye and the Smilin' Pass thing. I promise, too."

"Hi!" Up the creek road came Virgil's strong young voice in gay greeting. The jolt wagon, with its three passengers—two of whom were waving madly—had turned the corner.

It was well on in the evening. The spasmodic storm had recommenced with new fury and, added to the downpour, were almost continuous flashes of sharp lightning and a thundering cannonade whose echoes leaped from mountain to mountain.

Weary with their trip, the three new arrivals had early retired, Margaret to her tiny bedroom next to Camille's, Philip and Dr. Hunter to their temporary camping quarters in the little hospital building.

Wondering if the city girl who, during the evening, had alternated between spells of silence and of feverish vivacity, were frightened by the violence of the storm, Rose went to her door and knocked, at the same time announcing her identity.

"Come in," Margaret called in a muffled voice.

Rose entered and quickly closed the door behind her. On the narrow, iron bed, which she had moved into the center of the room in a vain attempt to avoid two steadily dripping leaks in the roof, sat Margaret, upright and clutching the edge with her daintily manicured nails. She was clad in a night-gown, cut low in the neck with lace insertion, over which she had thrown a silk kimona, and her small bare feet were thrust into embroidered bedroom slippers, her lustrous, wavy hair, unbraided, fell in a golden cascade over shoulders which trembled and shrank at every fresh thunder crash.

"Oh, my poor child!" cried her hostess, as she ran to the bed and gathered the girl in her mothering embrace. "You're frightened to death. Is it the storm?"

A fresh downpour descended upon the roof with such a trip-hammering that the first of Margaret's answer was inaudible, but, as the noise lessened a little, the woman heard her shudder, "Oh, it's *everything!*"

She turned, flung her arms tightly about Rose's neck and pressed her face against her breast. For a few moments Smiles merely held her close, crooning comforting words. Then Margaret began to sob, not too loudly, but with an intensity that shook her whole slender body. Finally she went on to speak:

"Oh, it's awful, Rose! I hate it, *loathe* it all. I was nearly shaken to death and drowned, too, riding

those miles and miles in that awful wagon, although I couldn't show how I felt, with . . . with Philip there. He . . . he was unbearable, too. He scarcely spoke to me on the whole trip south, and although Dr. Hunter t . . . t . . . tried to be nice you know how much *he* talks. And I thought it was going to be such a bu . . . bu . . . beautiful journey."

The girl paused and Rose—sympathetic as she really was, and disturbed, too, over Philip's inexcusable behavior—could not but smile a little.

"And now it's . . . it's all horrid here. How can anybody call *this* 'romantic'? I know that you wrote me how it would be; but you didn't make it half bad enough. It rains all the time and the mountains aren't pretty—just dreary and desolate—and the homes . . . Oh." She shuddered.

"Is that all?" inquired Rose, her fighting spirit beginning to stir.

"No. The . . . the little children—dirty little things—wouldn't answer when I waved to them." She was crying again; mole hills had assumed mountainous proportions in her vision, distorted by weariness and disappointment. "And the food—how can you eat it, after living in the city? But I suppose it's different with . . . with *you*; you were raised here and . . ."

"Stop!" With sudden decision Rose took the shaking, almost hysterical girl firmly by the shoulders and forced her to sit upright. "Listen to me, Margaret," she said, quietly. "I know that you're tired

out after that hard trip, and that your nerves are unstrung a little—this is the worst tempest we've had this summer. I'm terribly sorry for you, but you've got to stop. You have had your cry, and made all the complaints you can think of; at least I hope so, for you have already shown a spirit which is neither very brave, just, nor charitable."

"I . . . I didn't mean to be . . . be like that, Rose," whimpered the rather surprised, spoiled girl, as she began to fumble on the bed for the moist handkerchief which had fallen to the floor. The other supplied her need, even to wiping her eyes, as though she had in fact been a small child.

"Of course you didn't. But you were; not that I mind, for a case of 'nerves' is forgivable under the circumstances, and things will all look different to you by tomorrow's sunshine. But I ~~am~~ worried about your 'nerve,' and beginning to wonder if after all Philip wasn't right when he told me . . ." She caught herself up too late, for Margaret was crying, "So it was he who said it! I knew it. I used to think he was was almost perfect but he's the most ungallant man I ever knew. I despise him. I won't stay here with him; I won't stay anyway you're all as horrid as you can be. Father warned me. He was horrid, too. He's always given me all the money I want, but this time he wouldn't let me have a cent more than my fare back home. He . . . he said he knew I'd start back inside of a week and I *shall*."

"So Philip was right in his judgment, after all. You're nothing but a society dabbler in uplift; 'unstable'. And the vision which you made so much of in your childish letters was nothing but a . . . a mirage in your silly little mind. You . . . you're like your sister Marion, after all—a fickle woman."

If Donald could have heard his wife utter these sentences his mind might well have reverted to the by-gone day when she had said to him, "But a Rose has thorns." There was not a trace of a smile on her face now; her voice was bitter, and her words were lashes which cut to the quick. Yet she was not angry, but strangely cool and calculating. A double cause was at stake—their own, and a woman's worth.

"You . . . you *dare* to talk like that to me? Oh!"

Margaret sprang to her feet with eyes and cheeks flaming. For an instant Rose thought that the girl was actually about to strike her, for she had flung up both arms with hands clenched. Instead she threw herself prone on the bed, shaking convulsively.

"Poor child! I shouldn't have spoken that way. I didn't really mean it at all, dear," exclaimed the woman, pityingly, as she again threw her arms about Margaret's form. "Sometimes a merciful surgeon has to use a knife to cure. That was what I was doing, Margaret—I believe that I can speak like 'man to man' now. I've believed in you from the start; I believe now, and mean to forget every word that

you've said tonight. Tomorrow, when the sun shines, we'll both laugh at our own little tempest, and if you'll just stay a week—no, ten days—the vision will come back and nothing will be able to make you leave until *your* work is done, here. Forgive me for having been cruel, dear. And promise me just ten days."

The girl slowly got into a sitting posture and answered in a very little and humble voice, "It is not for me to forgive, Smiles. *I've* been cruel and silly—a little fool. But . . . but I don't want to stay, now. You said that you wouldn't be very angry if I came and went right back home."

"And I shan't. But ten days is such a tiny time. Please promise me that."

"Very well. I . . . I don't want to, but . . . but I'll promise," Margaret answered, slowly.

Rose kissed her, and the kiss was illuminated by the light of the full moon, just breaking through the clouds.

CHAPTER IV

MARGARET'S PLEDGE

THE days which followed found the two promises fulfilled to the letter. Humpty Hite's heart thrilled with the pride of ownership of a new tract of virgin mountainside, not far distant; Margaret Treville was still one of the family circle, and neither she nor Smiles referred by so much as a single syllable to their talk on the night of her arrival.

Whenever Donald commented to his wife on the girl's pallor—for she ate almost nothing—and her unnatural quietness, Rose invariably replied, "She's homesick, naturally. Let her alone; she'll get acclimated."

Margaret took her part in the normal life of the household and entered into the almost daily discussions relating to the future, but did it listlessly. And as often as possible she slipped away, to take long walks alone up the mountainsides and sit, scarcely moving, for many minutes on some out-jutting rock o'erlooking the enclosing hills and the creek, twining itself about their feet. Usually she would return with her arms full of flowers—late primroses, and big, flame-colored bells of the wild honeysuckle, purple cranesbill, rattlesnake weed with

its tiny yellow blossoms and rare late sprays of pink mountain laurel.

And Rose would smile a little. Certain spiritual battles must be fought out alone, and the soul is so near akin to Mother Nature, the wise counselor, that in the silent places it can hear her whisperings.

Towards Philip she was almost pathetically meek, for a modern and highly attractive society girl who was accustomed to have scores of men at her feet; with Donald she was friendly and companionable, although he privately complained of her lack of animation; but Virgil was the only one towards whom she turned for any real comradeship. Clearly the mountain youth, with his unquenchable enthusiasm, interested her and his eagerness brought occasional brief responsive gleams to her own eyes.

And Virgil was both pleased and flattered at the partiality shown to him by this highly bred girl of the city, the more so because he found himself all at once very lonely.

Camille, his little chum, was too busy fulfilling Rose's prophecy and applying herself to 'Uncle Phil,' to be with him at all. At least, so it seemed to Virgil, suddenly forgetful of the fact that she never *had* been with him, alone. Rose had early made it clear to both of them that they must from the start live up to the rules which were to apply to the school when it should actually be started; and mountain nature made strict regulations for mixed companionship imperative.

But if Margaret remained distrait, Philip went as far to the contrary.

Within a week, alone or with Camille, he visited almost every cabin up and down the creek and could address by name most of the men, besides being able to hail without error Isom's Isom and Uin's Isom, Balis and Simeon, Lige, Dasie, Sebrie, Shade, Ballard, Alger, Cricket, Louranie and the twins, Less and Fess—among the boys, and Versa, Verta, Vesa, Kanzali and Nonnie among the younger girls. More than once his entertaining accounts of his adventures caused consternation in The House of Happiness, particularly on the day when he came striding in with beaming face late to supper, to announce that he had that afternoon killed a rattlesnake and nearly been killed as a "revenuer," on the mountaintop.

"If you don't quit butting into everywhere and everything in this county, you *will* get a bullet between the ribs some day, in spite of that cheerful grin of yours," declared his brother-in-law. "Ignorance of the law—whether of the land or the hills—is no excuse, you know. *I* know what I am talking about. I stumbled on a moonshine still once myself, with unpleasant consequences."

Philip laughed. "But I'm a law-breaker myself," he replied. "Smell!"

He emitted a breath strongly alcoholic and Rose cried, "Philip Bentley! You promised"

"I know. I haven't been drinking—just sampling

some 200 proof moonshine; and once is decidedly enough. I couldn't go home and admit to the boys that I didn't know what it was like. Now could I?"

Rose had to smile, reprovingly. "What happened?" she asked.

"Oh, I just happened to meet a neighbor of ours—name deleted by censor, of course—'somewhere in France' and he threw a gun on me; I didn't blame him; it would be foolish for a man in his business to take too many chances."

Margaret was very pale and looking at him with horror in her eyes.

"I told him to shoot, if he liked; he'd have to be a cracking good marksman to hit me if I turned sidewise."

" 'Bad Bill' can hit a half dollar at a hundred paces!" interrupted Rose.

"Who said anything about 'Bad Bill'?" grinned Philip. "Well he—the unnamed man, I mean—naturally didn't show me his still, but, after we had chatted for a while, he mysteriously produced a bottle of 'first run' and satisfied my natural curiosity as to taste and method of manufacture. Yes, indeed; I'm now a self-admitted authority on moonshining and know all about stills, worms, flake stands, thumpin' kegs, corn and malt mash—we moonshiners call it 'beer' you know—singlings, doubling, 'n' everything. If you want to start a little private distillery . . ."

"Stop this instant, Phil! You should be punished

for talking like that before these children, even in a joke, and the first thing you know, you'll have our school raided, even before it's started."

"I'd be ashamed," supplemented Omie, laughing.

To complete the category Rose had likewise put into immediate effect her threat concerning Dr. Hunter—"John," now, after the custom of the country—and they were away almost daily for hours at a time, carrying the blessing of modern medicine into the homes where disease had held unchallenged sway. At other times, however, he seemed to avoid her almost pointedly—a state of affairs which she set down to his natural reticence—and he spent every possible moment in Donald's company, sitting, as it were, at the feet of the master and discussing medical and surgical problems and theories with him.

John, too, quickly fitted into his place in the growing organization with friction at only one spot. When he and Judd had been presented to one another on the evening of his arrival, each had acknowledged the introduction with brief words and briefer hand-clasp, and their voices had equally held evidences of the antagonism which total strangers sometimes feel towards each other on first meeting. Nor did either, as the days passed, attempt to change the situation or show any increased liking for the other. The fact had added to Rose's distress produced by the antipathy of Judd towards Virgil—for whom John seemed to form an immediate quiet liking—and she labored with Judd over it in private, but without effect.

"Reckon I haint got nothin' special agin him," he answered. "Jest don't cotton tew him."

"Oh, dear," she said, in repeating the conversation to Donald. "Life—*this* life especially—is just one darned thing after another, isn't it? We can't afford to lose John, the way he has taken hold, and Judd may growl all he likes, but he's devoted to us and our best point of contact with the other mountaineers."

"Besides being a necessary balance wheel to certain flywheels with whom I am acquainted."

Late on the afternoon of the ninth day after the arrival of the newcomers Rose and John rode up the steep path, turned their mounts over to Judd, who was lounging in the sun on the porch railing, and entered the office where Donald sat, an amateur architect, attempting to draw the plan for a new building to be erected some day, perhaps.

"What a time we've had," his wife exclaimed, as she dropped into a chair and began to fan herself with her becoming shade hat. "We've been treating 'sore eyes' and stopped at Versa's to see whether your operation had left a smooth scar, and her mother toted out her youngest baby to ask if we could do anything for its sores. He looks about as big as a normal week-old baby, and he's almost *a year*. At first I couldn't imagine what was the matter with him, for he seemed to be actually crusted all over with something; and so he was—with plain, old-fash-

ioned dirt, a quarter of an inch thick, from the top of his little, absolutely bald head to the soles of his clawlike feet. I wish that you might have seen that pitiful little thing, Donald."

"Thanks, I'd as lief be excused," answered her husband.

"Well, you've *got* to think of him, for he typifies a problem, too. I was so shocked and angry at first that I guess I almost became profane—I know that John did—and when she explained the reason for it I could have cried, instead. Such gross superstitions as those which still cling in the clouded minds of a few of these people are worse than pitiable; they're positively *criminal*!"

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded her husband, a bit impatiently.

"It appeared that some of them believe that if a new-born baby cries in a particular sort of way—I couldn't find out *how*, exactly—it would die if they should wash it. And that poor, stunted little tortured body had never had a bath! Think of it, a baby like our own Junie, who had never known the splashing, gurgling delight of a bath in soothing warm water with sweet-smelly soapsuds, during all its twelve months of life. *Isn't* it criminal?"

"It is. What did you do about it?"

"Took the long chance. Gave him his initial bath, first with olive oil and then with soothing warm water and sweet-smelly soap. It took us a full hour, after the preliminary battle was ended, for we had

to fight his mother almost tooth and nail to get her purely negative assent—a sort of Pontius Pilate permission in which she washed her hands of the whole affair. We even had to threaten her with what awful imaginary legal agencies would do if we reported the case to them.”

“And if it *should* die?”

“He won’t—now. We’ve given him his one chance to be a perfectly healthy, happy baby; the best of a dozen or more of them. That is, if we can watch over his future upbringing a little. Isn’t it time for the Council meeting?”

The formation of a regular council—a “clearing house of ideas”—even before the real enterprise could be begun, had been Donald’s suggestion. And it had already mapped out a general policy to be pursued, subject to change, in their proposed community work and citizenship training, in addition to accepting his suggestion as to how they should select the human material out of which their “Mountain Leaders of Men” were to be made—Rose would not permit anyone to add any qualifying words to that declaration.

It was likewise his suggestion to start a campaign for funds by circularizing the schools, clubs and institutions with which they had severally been connected, sending out little leaflets setting forth the Need and the Cause—although he had ended by declaring that he had rather take a licking than lend his name and influence to it. “It’s a plain hold-up,”

he said, and his wife had answered, "Yes, but hold-ups are the style nowadays and the end justifies the means." Long before she came Margaret had enthusiastically pledged the graduates of *her* Alma Mater upon her personal appeal to erect a Community building, and after her arrival she had gone so far towards redeeming her pledge as to draft a little pamphlet. Touched and encouraged, Rose had thanked her warmly, but when she had taken the copy alone into her room and read its unconvincing platitudes over several times she had shaken her head, sighed and put it away as utterly hopeless.

On the heels of Smiles' query the other members of the council drifted in, one by one; Margaret, Camille, Judd, Virgie and Philip—numbered with them *pro tempore*.

Half-humorously Donald called them to order, saying, " 'The time has come, the walrus said, to talk of many things: ' of how and why and wherefore, and . . . and . . . ' "

"And the news that each one brings," Philip concluded for him. "On my own behalf I beg formally to report that I've carried out my threat and organized most of the small boys of Beaten into a strictly unofficial troupe of Boy Scouts—a thing which I know absolutely nothing about and am therefore well qualified to do. When I am gone Virgie can doubtless get hold of some books on the subject and carry it on—if he wishes and Margaret

approves, of course. It may not fit into her college taught scheme for saving the world."

The girl flushed and bit her lips to stop their trembling and Rose barely checked herself from uttering the hot rebuke which would have only made matters worse. Philip, ordinarily the best-natured and kindest of men, was frequently guilty of similar thrusts at Margaret and his sister was much distressed by them.

"The Scout Oath happened to hit my fancy when I heard it once and I remember enough of it, I think, to start them off. Say, you should hear one little ragamuffin, not over six or seven years old, snap it out; it really touches the heartstrings a bit. His name's Billy—Tittle, I suppose and . . ."

"I know him, poor kiddie," Rose interrupted. "He's an orphan, the only child left alive of Kurt Tittle's family. Kurt was a moonshiner and folks say that Billy was almost raised on the vile stuff—they gave it to him just as the French give *vin ordinaire* to little more than babies." Margaret uttered a low exclamation of horror. "I think the poor kiddie simply bunks in at whichever of his numerous relations will keep him, temporarily."

"The same," Philip responded. "Well, we've made a beginning. Today, before turning the meeting into a baseball game, I gave them a highly moral lecture on the obligation of a scout to tell the truth at all times, so I imagine that from henceforth you'll

have nothing but little George Washingtons on this creek. I'm done."

Virgil spoke. "I've talked with Joel Fugate, who has the county school, and he's willing to coöperate with anyone we may send to assist him so long as we have to let *our* children go to the old school house, for lack of a better one."

"Good. Of course we hope to get a real school building soon, but I think that, when we do, it should be turned over to the County. The more I think of it the surer I am that we want to divorce our scheme from an ordinary school and follow Margaret's outline for a straight civic and citizenship center, laying our special stress on vocational training and character and leadership building through our clubs and example. Perhaps in that way we can avoid direct and immediate conflict with settlement schools like Fayville's. We're already looked on askance there, I've heard," said Rose.

"Then they may pass us up as merely harmless nuts," her husband supplemented, and Judd retorted, "Not necessarily harmless. The maounting people may hev different ideas on *that* subject."

A slight shuffle of bare feet in the doorway caused them all to look around. Before them stood a small and very grimy boy whose costume consisted of part of a shirt and a pair of men's overalls ten sizes too large and unevenly rolled up over his ankles. But his countenance, beneath an uncombed shock

of brown hair and its smudges of dirt, was smiling, bright and full of appeal.

"Why, hello, Billy boy," exclaimed Philip. "What are you doing here?"

With the directness of childhood and mountain nature combined, the intruder answered, "I hev come fer tew live at the school that you-all is aimin' tew start hyar."

"Well, that seems to be settled," said Donald, *sotto voce*, but he smiled as he asked aloud, "And who are you, son?"

"I'm Kurt Tittle's Bill. Pappy, he got hisself shot last year, and I haint never had no mammy, I don't guess. That's why I kin cum hyar."

"Behold our first formal applicant for admission—a eugenic impossibility," Donald remarked.

"But there are exceptions to every rule, Don. He certainly looks 'peert'—as Aunt Lissy says. Don't you think we might try him?" Rose begged.

"Oh, please!"

The others turned to observe that Margaret's eyes were tear-filled and her face glowing with an entirely new light. At the same instant she sprang from her chair, ran to the boy's side and kneeling, enfolded him in her arms. The dirty overalls and dainty muslin dress of the woman to whom all grime was loathsome became as one.

The boy squirmed for a moment. Such a caress was a new experience in his life and he wasn't sure that he enjoyed it.

"How old are you, Billy boy?" she asked, and her voice was soft and filled with the mother-note.

"I don't reckon I'm more'n six—or maybe eight."

"And you're sure that you want to come to our school?"

"That's what I wuz aimin' tew do."

"Can you read or write any, now?"

He shook his head; then added more brightly, "But I kin make moonshine right smart."

"Don, you *will* keep him? You'll let me keep him? Oh, the pity of it: a little kiddie who should have had games and love and happiness and who only knows—moonshine. *Please*, Donald,—Rose! If you'll only keep him and have him adopted by the Community Center I promise to give him everything that he has lacked—clothes, education and . . . and . . . a mother's love. I meant to go home . . . tomorrow. But I'll stay; I'll stay as long as you and *he* need me. Oh, please!" The tears were running down her cheeks.

Philip whistled, softly. "You really want to stay here, always, son?"

"You bet I does—erlong with this purty woman," answered the boy.

"And if you should, will you promise to be a good boy and live up to the Scout Law, always?"

"Reckon I will, ef I kin stay."

"Let's see if you remember the oath."

The lad straightened up within Margaret's encircling arms and began earnestly, "'On my honor

I will dew my best tew dew my duty tew Gawd and my country and obey the Scaout Law; tew help other people et all times, tew keep myself physic'ly strong, ment'ly awake and morally straight'."

"You'll do," said the man. "Keep him, Donald. I'll attend to the clothes and . . . and toy part."

"Well, I'll be darned," murmured Donald.

CHAPTER V

TROUBLE

"OH, how I wish that your vacation wasn't so nearly over, or that it might last forever. I know that you are needed at the dear old hospital, but we need you here, too, Philip," said Rose, as, a few days later, they were returning from a walking trip up the creek.

"As to your wish, the same here raised to the *n*th power; but you've as much need of another doctor at Smiling Pass as you have of another head."

"Exactly! I could use another head to excellent advantage, as it happens. But I didn't mean that we need you as a doctor; just as a *man*. Donald can handle the office executive end of the thing as skillfully as he has done everything else; but, although John is making good as physician, he is too reserved to be of much help in any other way, while Virgie—for all his amazing enthusiasm and go—is young and likely to err. He has erred already, and made enemies for us. His judgment isn't mature and the fact that he, a mountaineer, has seen the vision and developed initiative in himself, makes him the more intolerant of all the rest who lack both, as Judd does. Of course we've got to use every weapon that

comes to our hands at first, and we may be able to get some help from the older boys, like Malvary Amos”

“Yes. He’s smart as a whip, and a mighty good-looking boy, to boot,” Philip interrupted.

“And therefore dangerous, like all edged tools. Oh, why is it that in this world the safe ones are usually incompetent, and the competent ones unsafe? Now you’re both”

“Incompetent and unsafe?” teased her brother and she pinched him.

“Don’t joke—now. I’ve only a few days more before you go, and I want your advice. You could be so helpful in that way, as well as with the children and in the role of conciliator-in-chief. Everyone seems to like you—goodness knows why! What do you honestly think of the proposition as a whole? I know that you’ve been here only a little over three weeks, but you seem to have grasped the mountain situation and the mountaineer’s character wonderfully well.”

He answered seriously. “Frankly, Smiles, I don’t know. You may be facing utter failure, for the task of butting up against the inertia produced by a hundred years of stagnation here is almost Machiavellian; it’s worse than lifting a dead load. And I’m perfectly sure that if you take up this white man’s burden you’ll have to carry it for years.”

“Don’t, don’t, Philip.” Rose’s voice was full of pain. “That isn’t the idea. It’s to be a mountaineer

enterprise; we're merely to give it its start. Then mountain men capable of being leaders and up-lifters—in the true, not the cheap city sense of the word—will come; they *must* come."

"They must, of course, unless the race is really lost. And they will, in time—it's unthinkable that this inherently splendid stock should be allowed 'to perish from the earth.' But you are making your wish the fa . . . the mother to the thought when you talk about a few years. *I* say the existing generations are hopeless as a whole—you can't teach an old dog new tricks—except of course for the inevitable exceptions—the Virgils. Don't waste your time on them except to do what you can to make their lives more comfortable and happier. It's the new generation—almost the babies—or nothing, Rose; at least that's as it looks to me. Catch 'em young and then keep after them everlastingly. Your mountain Moseses are still 'in the bulrushes.'"

"I suppose—my *reason* tells me—that you're right, but it's awfully discouraging. It *all* is. With the exception of Virgie and Malvary, who are always rubbing each other the wrong way, there is scarcely a soul in this place with enough ambition and initiative to fill up the hole in the road in front of his cabin, although his mule stumbles in it at least seven hundred and thirty times a year. But I love them. There *is* gold here, treasure worth digging and fighting for, isn't there?"

"Sure. I like 'em, too, immensely. And I'll say this much, whether you folks make a go of this experiment or not, it's the only solution of the problem. They've got to do it themselves, some time, and through their own community organizations and leaders. The usual type of outside help is all right in a way. So is morphine, but each is a palliative, not a cure. Knife 'em, Rose. Jab it in and twist it around even if they kick and holler. Then if the individual patient refuses to improve 'lave him be'—as Pat would say."

"If you could only stay to help us!" she exclaimed, back to their starting point.

"I'd like to. But I've my own work to do and no excuse like yours to be here; I almost wish I had. I'm sure that John thinks that I'm a hopeless product of the modern city life, if not actually effeminate—his face showed that the first time he visited my not altogether unattractive rooms—but at heart I'm a hill-dweller listening to the call of the wild."

"And so am I, the more so for my bringing-up. If we call ourselves 'shut in' by these mountains, what must we say about the millions who live their lives in city streets enclosed by brick walls. By the way, what do you think of my other denizen of the city *now*?" she asked abruptly.

"Meaning Margaret? I may as well practice what I preach to the Boy Scouts and tell the truth; which is that I'm surprised at her. She's shown qualities which I didn't suspect existed in her, since Billy Boy

appeared at that psychological moment and made his 'human appeal.' But, to be equally honest, I don't believe that it will last. Just now she's riding the crest of one of her impulse waves, but when it recedes and leaves uncovered the mud, and the rocks labeled hard labor, she'll start back home. See if she doesn't."

"I don't believe it, now," Rose answered stoutly. "Do you realize that you've been awfully mean towards her, Phil? Somehow it isn't like you."

The man grew a trifle red and looked embarrassed. "Yes, I suppose I have. It's a caddish thing to have done, too. But honestly—to employ the language of cultured Boston—'she got my goat.' Sarcasm is an assassin's weapon; it stabs in the back, but I've half-hoped that I might get her fighting mad and so put some stick-to-itiveness into her, if only as the result of pique. Haven't you ever tried to do that with someone?"

It was the woman's turn to flush, but he didn't observe the fact and she said, "If you're so certain that she will leave soon perhaps you're willing to make a wager on it."

"Sure."

"Very well. I claim the woman's prerogative to name the terms. If she stays six months you'll have to pay me a five-pound box of the very best chocolates made in America—I'm simply dying for some, now."

"Done. The odds are at least six to one against you. By the way, what do I get if I win?"

"A box of cigars?"

"Not on your life—unless I give you the money and then buy them myself. You admit that you're practically bankrupt and besides a girl's taste in tobacco is execrable."

"I should hope so. Well, what *can* a penniless sister give her brother—not that I expect to lose."

"An invitation to come back next year."

"Done." The two clasped hands, laughing. "You'd get that anyway. And I'll wager again, that you'll see some changes—both human and material."

"I have already," he answered, significantly. "Whether or not I'm right concerning Margaret I was wrong about Camille. Either I didn't know her at all before, or she's blossomed out amazingly. She's all that you wrote regarding her. What more can be said?"

"She's a darling. I'm glad that you feel like that, Phil," replied Rose, softly.

He laughed.

"But I don't feel like *that*—yet, anyway. I told you that I could never love another woman as I did . . ."

"Hush." Rose slipped her hand affectionately into his, and they were both silent for a moment. At length she said brightly, "Billy boy is to be Margaret's salvation; I know it. She's been pampered at home and bowed down to abroad so much that the real woman instinct was smothered in a mass of self-interest. But it's there, Phil. She's got to fight

to make him over and the fight will alike strengthen her and open her eyes to the need of extending the battle front to include *all* these poor kiddies. Then the unromantic side of the struggle won't be a deterrent. What a shame it is that we had to send him back to his uncle's cabin even for a few weeks, to live in that den of trachoma and . . . and everything! I suppose that he sleeps with Desty—poor thing—and three or four other of the boys."

"Well, it won't be for long; if your appeal gets across."

"*Will* it? We simply must have another building at once, to use as a dormitory and half-a-dozen other things, temporarily. And if we can only get enough to buy those trees, we'll manage to get them sawed and turned into a structure somehow."

As she spoke Philip drew from his pocket the proof of a little booklet in which Rose had made her appeal with touching simplicity. Turning its pages, he answered, "Yes, I think it will go. It certainly is a pretty thought, Smiles, each oak tree standing for a mountain child and offering itself for adoption to die vicariously that the child may live and have life more abundantly. I should think that the graduate nurses of the Children's Hospital ought to be able to interest the families where they are serving in the project and I'll push it when I get home."

Philip was silent for a moment and when he spoke again it was with marked hesitancy and unease.

"I wish that I might help, financially, Smiles. But . . . well I can't, now. I used to warn you against extravagance, just as Don did, but I've always lived about up to my income and . . . I hate to tell you this, but I know you must wonder a little why I haven't come forward with an offer in line with my verbal interest in the work."

Rose would have interrupted with an indignant denial, but he checked her by hurrying on.

"The truth is that Father MacDonald got to me for a fairly sizable loan, two years ago. It about cleaned me out, as it naturally went up the flue, just as Donald's did. For heaven's sake, don't mention it to him, though. I don't care a rap on my own account, but now I wish that I had . . ."

"Bless your generous heart, Phil," broke in his sister in a pained voice, and she pressed his hand tenderly. "Oh, I'm so sorry! Poor daddy MacDonald! He shouldn't have appealed to you, of course—he had no right to do that—but what mental torture he must have been in! A drowning man doesn't reason, he instinctively clutches at anything within reach by which he may be able to save himself. Of course we'll repay you, some day, but . . . *Now* what's the matter?"

The exclamatory question was occasioned by the sound of two voices raised in angry altercation on the porch of the House of Happiness, whose steps they had almost reached. The first was Virgil's, and they heard him say, peremptorily, "Yes, you will do

as I say, if you expect to stay here. Besides, I heard Rose ask you to fix those palings so that the hogs wouldn't get through them, and here you are, loafing around."

"I reckon hit haint none uv *your* business," answered the other—Malvary Amos—hotly.

"I reckon it is. I'm not trying to 'boss,' as you put it, but you've got to realize that the rules were made to be lived up to and that it's part of my job to see that they are—I share in the authority here, whether you like it or not. Besides, you ought to remember that we were responsible for getting you and your father . . ."

"That's enough, Virgil," called Rose. The speaker stopped suddenly and the other came running down the stairs. In the becoming tweed suit which Philip had given him, with the flaunting red necktie, which was his chief pride, he looked like any well-groomed and manly city youth, although he might have passed for nearer twenty than sixteen, for his darkly handsome, somber face was strongly moulded by the hand of experience. His black hair swept down over his forehead almost to his eyes, which were blazing; his thin cheeks and clinched jaws were white and his lips fairly quivering with suppressed rage.

"If he don't quit pickin' on me, I'll . . . I'll *kill* him some day," he said unsteadily.

"Tell me, what is the matter, my boy?" asked the woman quietly, as she laid a soothing arm about his tense shoulders.

"Hit's his everlastin' bullyin', Smiles. I kaint *stand* hit." The boy's whole frame was trembling spasmodically now. "Nobody haint never bossed me, before. And he said I was loafin' on the job you give me tew do. Hit's a lie! I fixed them palin's until the nails give out an hour ago, and put a board across the bottom uv the rest uv the hole tew keep the hogs aout—he couldn't see that, I don't guess. But I wasn't goin' tew tell him. Hit *haint* none uv his business."

"You should have told him, Mally. And in a way it was his business, because the work which we all have to do is as much part of our education as the study. The school part hasn't really got going here yet, but you know that we're all trying to act as though it had, and Virgil is playing his part. He's terribly in earnest about wanting to train all the mountain boys, big and little, to be real men, and if he sometimes seems dictato . . . *bossy*, we mustn't forget that he got his own training in the army, where those in authority don't request, they order."

For a few moments more she talked to him in an affectionate, motherly manner and finally sent him away, somewhat mollified, with his adored Philip. Then, with a sterner countenance, she mounted the steps and accosted Virgil, who was waiting for her. He started to speak in a somewhat apologetic tone but she interrupted him, somewhat tartly.

"Of course he shouldn't have answered you that way, Virgie. But, neither should you have spoken

as *you* did and you know it, perfectly well. The inbred tendency to quarrel is one of the things we're going to try hardest to combat, and how can we succeed if you, on one hand, and Judd on the other, persist in being quarrelsome?"

"I know," he answered, rather humbly. "But their independence and laziness is enough to try the patience of a saint. Judd is always letting things go and I just thought that Mally . . ."

"You shouldn't 'just think'—I mean that you shouldn't jump at conclusions. And we've all got to have the patience of archangels. One false step is as likely as not to send us all the way down to the bottom of the hill again, just when we are beginning to get started up. If you begin to quarrel with the first boy we have . . ."

"I didn't. He began it as soon as he came. Besides, he's all the time hanging around Omie. She's only a kid, but it's against the rule and I won't have it."

"I understand and I'll talk to him about that. But for the rest, even if he does seem a little belligerent, you should remember that it takes a higher type of manhood to smile and forbear than to scowl and fight. Bear our motto in mind. I hate to lecture, Virgie, but . . ."

"I know; and you're dead right, mother Rose. I shouldn't have done it, but I was nervous and . . ."

"Nervous? Why, has anything happened?" she

demanded with a swift premonition of something wrong.

"Well . . . I guess that Donald will tell you."

Virgil fled down the long flight of steps, three at a time, and Rose turned and, with sinking heart, hurried into the office.

"What's the matter, Donald?" she cried from the doorway. "Virgil hinted . . ."

"And the kick is likely to follow, if there is anything in your cry of 'Wolf, wolf!' I shouldn't have given the matter a serious second thought if all of you hadn't raised so many storm warnings. Now . . ."

"For goodness' sake, Don, tell me what has happened!"

"Something rather tragic. The Tittle baby that you washed is . . ."

"Not dead?"

He nodded.

CHAPTER VI

UNEXPECTED ALLIES

"OH, Donald! The poor little thing!" Rose snatched up her own laughing little daughter and held her close. For the moment her single thought was for the pitiable baby whose life was tragically—if mercifully—ended. What effect its death might have on them had no place in her mind. Dr. Hunter looked up at her from the medical volume which he was studying and his eyes kindled slowly. Whatever might have been his ordinary feelings towards her, the display of mother love always seemed to stir him deeply and lift the mask from his almost unchanging countenance.

"What happened?" she demanded at length.

"Don't know. John brought in the report—says that no one seems to know exactly, but the story has apparently spread all up and down the creek already. Tobias and his wife say . . ."

"I can guess. Did you try to find out the facts, John?"

The other man nodded. "Couldn't. They wouldn't even let me in. Tobias was at home, as usual, and he threatened . . . never mind."

"I'm going right up there this instant," Rose declared, putting her hat on again.

"You're not; I absolutely forbid it. Are you crazy, Rose?" her husband burst forth, and she responded, "On the contrary. It is the only thing to do, for two reasons. If I don't show a sympathetic interest a bad matter will be made worse, and besides, the only way to conquer superstitious hostility is to downface it with at least a show of bravery. I'll admit to *you* that I am just a tiny bit frightened, not on my own account—they won't hurt me—but at the thought of what effect this pitiful little tragedy will have on our work. I won't let them know it, though."

"Don't do it, Rose." Donald's tone suddenly changed to one of entreaty. "Of course you're theoretically right, but if anything should happen to you . . ."

"Nothing will, in broad daylight, you dear goose." John's face darkened, almost imperceptibly. "I didn't suppose that fear had any place in you."

"Hasn't it? If you were tied to a chair . . . well, go if you feel that you must, but do be careful, and take John or Virgil with you."

"No. That would look as though I were afraid, but I'll compromise and take Omie." The child-woman had appeared in the doorway, radiating youthful energy. "You'll go up to Tobias' cabin with me, won't you, dear?" she asked.

"Rose, you haint . . . you aren't aiming tew go up there!" exclaimed the girl. "Hasn't Donald told you . . .?"

"Yes; that is why I'm going. You are not afraid, are you?"

"I don't reckon I am . . . with *you*." Omie declared firmly.

Hardly half an hour, filled with ever-increasing uneasiness on Donald's part, had passed before the two were home again. Rose slowly shook her head in answer to his inquiring demand and said, "We couldn't get in, either. The door is usually open, summer and winter, but it was shut and fastened and the family wouldn't even answer my request to enter after I had told them who it was. Donald, I . . . I'm afraid."

Her momentary display of weakness reacted conversely upon her husband. He drew her close against his shoulder, comforting and strengthening her with the firm assurance that there was nothing whatever to fear—saying that nothing would come of it and anyway it was absurd to worry about the crossing of bridges which would probably never be reached.

"Of course it's disheartening, child, after you had done your best, and it has its tragic as well as its pathetic features," he went on. "But you said yourself that only a few people here still believe that superstitious rot. What has become of your faith in the Power which, you usually insist, always causes the right to triumph?"

"The right *cause* always moves on to final triumph, but you and I know that it's often over a path

filled with stumbling-block incidents, Don. They may be useful in toughening our wills, but just the same they're temporarily painful to the shins which bump against them. How absurd; as though wills had shins!" Rose laughed, a little shakily. "Well, there's no sense worrying over the inevitable, which will happen whether we worry or not—and there may nothing come of it at all. Hark! There's the supper bell. Don't you think that you could walk to the dining-room leaning on my shoulder and without your crutches? I know that you're beginning to get a little better, dear."

Donald slowly pulled himself erect and placed part of his weight tentatively on his crippled leg—which had, indeed, somewhat improved with the prolonged rest and the massage and electrical treatment which she and Dr. Hunter had given it several times each day. Suddenly his face went white. He dropped back into the chair and beads of perspiration started from his forehead. "Go, go," he panted. "I'll be better—I'll come in a few minutes . . . on my crutches."

There was unusual gaiety at the supper table and afterwards in the study-office. Margaret, from whom news of the little catastrophe had been purposely withheld, was livelier than at any time since her arrival. And the rest—particularly Donald—forced a cheerfulness that they were far from feeling, in order to drown out the voices of past contentions, present pain and future trouble. Although the con-

versation was general, Margaret and Virgil talked principally of their plans for the school-to-be; Rose, Donald and John of immediate needs of a medical nature; and Philip and Camille—laughing continuously—learned at least three old and amusing songs from Omie, who seemed to have an inexhaustible supply.

They had mastered the mournful ballad called "The Little Sparrow," which told in minor strains of the suicide of a maiden crossed in love, and that of the girl who was nearly as unfortunate and begged her lover to

"Throw your arms 'round me before it's too late,
Throw your arms 'round me, feel my heart break,"

and were chanting lustily the endless verses covering the varied requests of the old man who

"Asked my mother to set him a stool,
With his old shoes on and his leggins,
She set him a stool and he sot like a fool,
With his old shoes on and his leggins,"

when they were startlingly interrupted.

There was again the sound of many shuffling feet moving along the piazza floor, then silence, followed by a heavy-handed demand on the panel of the door.

For a moment no one spoke, and looks with mutual questionings and a suggestion of trepidation appeared on every face, but Margaret's and John's. Her's showed surprise, merely; his was stern but emotionless.

"No! I'll go," exclaimed Rose, forestalling Virgil's movement toward rising and, before anyone could prevent her, she had seized one of the two kerosene lamps by which the room was illuminated and hastened to the hall door.

"Go on, you fools! Bring her back!" gasped Donald, limp and white from the exquisite agony of his own attempt to rise. His words galvanized the three other men into action, too late, however, to prevent Rose from flinging the door wide open and holding the lamp up so that its mild yellow light spread over the group on the porch.

"You're Mistress MacDonald—what they calls 'Smiles,' I reckon."

A bearded mountaineer, whose face was unfamiliar to any of the tense group in the hall, uttered the words abruptly.

"Yes. What do you want? Oh, what has happened? Has someone been hurt?"

The complete change in Rose's voice was produced by the sight of a form lying on a rude litter of saplings and boughs carried by four of the rough-looking mountaineers who stood a step behind the speaker.

"Thet air a fact. Bill Cress, he got hisself shot yesterday evenin' over tew Gray maounting and we-all hev brung him hyar. He told us thet thar was a doctor. . . ."

"There is. Oh, I'm so glad you did it! Bring him right in, men . . . no, take him to that other building—the hospital. We'll come there."

The bearers of the weighty burden turned and trudged slowly along the connecting veranda while Rose surrendered her lamp to Virgil and ran into the office, where Margaret, very pale and with her eyes filled with startled fright, was standing beside Donald unconsciously clutching his sleeve, and Camille and Omie were still seated, leaning tensely forward.

"Did you hear, Don? It's Bad Bill . . . wounded. We've got to have this other light."

"Yes, yes. I'm coming, too . . . just a minute," he gasped. "Get my instrument case."

"Donald! You can't do it. My *dear!* Have you forgotten that we have two other doctors here?"

"What do they know about wounds?" His tone was petulant, almost abusive. "I'll come."

"I . . . I reckon thet I'll do purty good, naow." Cress groaned, then added, "Much obleeged, doctor and . . . and the same tew you, Smiles. I . . . I allows you-all can caount me a friend uv yourn from tonight."

It was an hour later. The litter-bearers had long since departed, refusing an invitation to remain until the morrow. According to the story told by their spokesman, Bill had merely "got hisself shot" and it was not for them to inquire how or why, although they might suspect that the bullets which John Hunter had, under Donald's direction, removed from the mighty thigh and side of the injured man had come from the rifle of a revenue officer or sheriff.

Rather graphically, too, the mountaineers had told of the painfully slow journey over three mountain passes with their heavy load—a trip which might have been covered by a walker in three hours but which had taken them from daybreak until ten in the evening. At first they had attempted to come by the impossible mountain road with their charge in a wagon; but, after being forced repeatedly to take out the mule and draw it themselves, or lift the litter from it and carry the wounded man in order to ease his agony, they had decided to bear it themselves the rest of the way, with short advances and frequent long pauses.

Seated in a cushioned chair Donald had directed the other two physicians, robed in their white surgical gowns, in probing for and extracting the two deeply imbedded bullets. The wounded man had borne the pain stoically without anesthetics, and when he was ensconced in a cot bed, better than any he had ever known, he made his pledge of fealty with an earnest simplicity which told them that they had indeed made a valuable friend and ally that night

Commenting upon it as Rose was aiding him to undress later, Donald said, "Well, Fate has smiled on us in one respect today, anyway. It's presented you with the chance to carry out your declaration *in re* 'Bad Bill.' Funny how things turn out, sometimes. When I heard those mountaineers' feet scuffling on the porch I would have sworn that . . .".

"And so would I. I was frightened almost to death for a minute," his wife broke in.

"If you were, you managed to keep the fact pretty well concealed. I don't know what I am going to do to keep you from rushing in where angels fear to tread." His voice sounded humorously despairing, but he laughed as he drew her close for an instant, and added softly, "You little brick."

There was a suggestion of a tremolo in Rose's echoing laugh as she kissed him. Ignoring his praise of herself, she said, "Margaret was plucky, wasn't she? Of course Camille and I didn't need her help, but I let her stay just to try her out and give her a chance to see what life here really means. If she is to remain she must become accustomed not only to dirt and hardship but to 'battle, murder and . . . ' *Don, what's that?*"

Her quotation had been interrupted by the noise of a fusilade of rifle shots, shattering the midnight silence outside. At the same moment came a nearer crash as one of the front windows was shattered to fragments by a stone. Holding her breath, she clung to him tightly for a second. Again the cracking of rifles and with it the sound of voices calling out jeers and threats in drunken tones.

"It's come, Don. We spoke too soon," she whispered. From the house next door came a wrathful bellow in Bill Cress' deep bass, demanding a gun, the sound of the front door being flung open and the voices of Philip and John in angry, excited exclama-

tions. Rose broke from her husband's encircling arm, threw a kimona over her undergarments and ran out into the hallway, just as Margaret, similarly clad, and Camille, in her nightgown, appeared from their respective rooms, large-eyed and pale.

"For God's sake keep away from the door, Rose!" entreated Donald.

She promptly disobeyed—if, indeed, she was conscious at all of what he said—opened it wide and, with the other two girls huddled in each other's arms behind her, peered out in the direction of the creek below. The enclosing hills made a giant cup, filled to the brim with impenetrable shadow, which the faint light of the distant stars failed to penetrate. Nothing could she see, not even the forms of Philip and John who were on the piazza but a few feet to the right of her. There was a momentary lull, during which the never-ending murmur of the creek and the piping of frogs was distinctly audible. Then from the direction of Virgil's cabin across the creek came his voice raised in anger and army profanity accompanied by two shots in rapid succession, whose comparative loudness proclaimed their origin in an army rather than a hunting rifle. They were answered by a few more scattering shots from directly below, fired, doubtless, into the air out of pure deviltry, and then a snapping and cracking of wood followed by a crash, and rude laughter. Finally came the sound of feet moving up the rough creek road, an occasional rifle crack and silence again.

"Don't go down there, Phil!" Rose cried out as she saw her brother reappear in the hospital doorway with a lighted lantern, and Margaret added beseechingly over her shoulder, "Oh, *please* don't. They . . . they might hurt you."

Camille said nothing but she pressed her tightly clasped hands against her young bosom, unseen in the dark.

He yielded to their entreaties, extinguished the lantern, and joined them in the doorway. Dr. Hunter did likewise, taking his stand close by Rose's side, yet pressed hard back against the edge of the door so that he should not so much as touch her. From the new cabin and shedlike store combined, which Judd was building for future occupancy and which even now served as a shelter for Bud and Malvary, came their voices as they appeared with a lantern whose bobbing light moved to meet that borne by Virgil as he approached, leaping from stone to stone across the shallow stream. The combined mild yellow radiance disclosed the fact that fully half of the paling fence had been laid flat and the little potato patch behind it trampled down and ruined.

"Oh, what a shame! The cowards . . . no, the poor foolish things," Rose exclaimed.

"I think that I recognized some of 'em by their voices," called Virgil, as, lantern in one hand and rifle in the other, he came striding up the steep ascent toward them. "Guess they were all young fel-

lows, full of moonshine, and just waiting for an excuse to try to throw a scare into us. Nobody was hurt, was there?"

"No, thank God," answered Smiles. "But someone would have been if Bill Cress could have got out of bed and hold of a gun. Did you hear him roar? Oh, dear. What a *shame* it is. I feel like crying and . . . and swearing."

And thereupon to everyone's amazement, she did both, first uttering a few soul-satisfying expletives which from the lips of a man would have passed unnoticed but which, coming from her, shocked fully as much as they amused her hearers, and then weeping miserably for a moment on the shoulder of the raincoat which covered Philip's pajamas. The little tempest was speedily over and it served to bring relief to the high-strung tension of all the party. They laughed—all save John Hunter—and an instant later Smiles had joined in their mirth, although her laughter was from the lips rather than from the heart.

"Please forgive me, everybody," she beseeched. "I've been bad and sad: now I'm getting mad—mad clean through. We're not going to be frightened by any childish display like this, are we?"

"Well, I guess not," affirmed Virgil staunchly, and Margaret's voice came somewhat unsteadily out of the dim background, "Are we downhearted? No!"

"That's the talk, Margaret!" approved the youth.

"We 'have just begun to fight.' I say is . . . is Camille there? She wasn't frightened, was she?"

"Yes—and no," answered Margaret, shielding from the lad's searching gaze the dim shrinking form of the girl, who had suddenly become painfully conscious of her unconventional attire. All of them, indeed, now became aware of their dishabille and the fact that they were shivering, partly from the chill which the midnight air held, partly from nervous excitement, and they hastily separated to return to bed.

No one slept much during the balance of the night however, and the circle which formed about the breakfast board at seven o'clock the following morning showed several rather drawn and pale countenances. Although the night darkness had bred a needless fear, it had also lent to the affair something of a romantic thrill which was wholly dissipated when stark daylight had disclosed the full extent of the petty devastation—the shattered window, upturned fence and trampled garden.

They were discussing it soberly when Billy Boy walked, unannounced, into the room and stood before them on one grimy bare foot with the big toe of the other twisting upon it. His unwashed face showed signs of past tears and present distress.

Margaret sprang from her seat and, running to his side, put her arms tenderly about him. "Why Billy Boy! What are you doing here so early?" she cried.

He almost rudely squirmed out of her embrace and addressed Philip. "A Boy Scout hes tew help other people at all times and . . . and tell the truth, don't he, Uncle Phil?" was his abrupt demand.

"Yes, son. A Scout is truthful. But why do you ask?"

The child's lips quivered and tears came into his eyes again. "Tobias will skin the hide off'n me, I reckon, but I've jest got tew tell you-all the truth. Thet thar baby didn't die 'cause you washed hit, Rose . . ."

He paused and all of them regarded him with questioning intensity.

"Hit . . . Hit's mother she rolled on hit when she was asleep, night before last and squoze the breath outer hit. They told me not tew tell no one, but I reckon I jest hev tew tell you, 'cause . . . 'cause I air goin' tew belong tew you."

Margaret caught him close to her breast, sobbing a little. There was an instant of surprised silence. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," said the Scripture. They had the truth, but the disclosure was startling and painful.

"Thank you for telling us, Billy Boy," said Donald. "You do belong to us—we're going to adopt you legally, but you may stay here from now on, we'll make a place for you to sleep, somewhere."

"He can have a cot in my room!" declared Margaret, flushing a little, but almost defiantly and Philip answered, "No, he'll bunk with me until I

go and then can stay in the hospital with John while you're getting your dormitory built. Don't be afraid; we'll take care of you, sonny."

The boy gave him a look of childish gratitude, smiling through his tears and Rose whispered gently, "Our first convert. Pass through, from Shadow to Sunshine, Billy Boy."

"Well, in a sense it's a relief to know what really happened, but what good is it going to do us? We can't very well declare it forth from the housetop—at least not without getting Billy in wrong," began Donald, but his wife interrupted him with, "Wait! I have an idea."

There was a note akin to hysteria in the little laugh which preceded her next sentence.

"Aunt Lissy Triplett has sworn herself eternally my friend since I have been dressing her sores and she may be just the one to help us."

"How, in the name of goodness?" demanded her husband.

"Only a few at the most can possibly believe, even here, that our washing that poor baby killed it, and those who are superstitious enough to believe it, certainly credit her with her self-declared abilities as a seer and witch-doctor. If I can get her to announce openly that she has had a vision portraying the true cause of its death—and I'm sure that I can—it will serve our purpose. The Tittles won't deny it—it's a thing which happens all-too-often, the way families sleep here."

"Do you really believe that you can get away with a thing savoring of the dark ages, like that, Rose?" asked Philip, scoffingly.

"I do, absolutely. The dark ages are here, *now*. We have every century from the tenth to the twentieth represented on this one creek this minute. But, heaven helping us, we'll wipe out all but the last, before we're through."

CHAPTER VII

MAIDS, MEN—AND MULES

ROSE's peculiar prophecy came true. It should be said on Aunt Lissy's behalf, however, that she acted with sincerity as well as friendliness, for her warped brain must have come to believe that it had actually envisioned what her new friend described to her—otherwise she could never have stated it so convincingly. Confronted with the true fiction, promptly reported by a neighbor to whom Aunt Lissy had told it, Mrs. Tittle broke down, admitted it and wept bitterly. After all, she was a mother and had lost her baby. With pitying forgiveness Smiles went to her, was at last received within the dismal cabin, and departed, an hour later, with one more humble worshipper added to her list.

The news of the drunken demonstration, the sight of the wanton destruction, likewise helped to cause a reaction. That afternoon and evening several of the dwellers in Beaten found one pretext or another for strolling up to the House of Happiness and each, before his departure, casually offered his sympathy and—what meant more—his friendship. A number of them came to call on Bill Cress and were doubtless further influenced by his positively violent ex-

pressions of fealty to his benefactors. And not a few of them volunteered to force their multitudinous offspring to attend the new school, Smiles' diplomacy being several times taxed to the uttermost to refuse their indiscriminate offers without seeming so to do. Margaret insisted upon seizing the opportunity thus presented, and the next afternoon visited the little schoolhouse up the creek, in company with Virgil, and—conquering her disgust at the sights and smells—gave the pupils an appealing little talk on the rudiments of ethics and citizenship, for, although they were to pick and choose their special material, they meant to give as freely as possible to all those of their own neighborhood.

Moreover, since good things, like evil ones, seem to come in sequences, Virgil's evening ride over to the post-office on Devil's Fork had produced the day's crowning happiness. He came in waving aloft a really sizable bunch of letters and while Rose and Donald were opening them, laughingly described what preceded their delivery to him.

"Mrs. Everage, our honored postmistress, was working up in the field when I arrived," he said. "She consented to come down, after she had finished picking the row of beans on which she was at work, and, on the way, told me how nervous she was over having to keep on hand the number of stamps necessary to mail the 'tree letter' we've been sending out. I guess that I told you before that the 'post-office' is one wooden box which she used to keep in

the little store she runs there. Well now she's moved it upstairs and keeps it *under her bed*. And, if you'll believe it, she keeps the door to the room locked and goes up a ladder and through the window when anyone wants to buy a stamp or get a letter. Can you beat it?"

Rose scarcely heard him, so absorbed was she in the contents of her mail, for almost all of it had come in response to their appeal for help in building the House of Service, in which should be located both vocational workrooms and dormitories for the boys, until separate quarters might be provided. Almost without exception they contained checks—most of them for small denominations, to be sure, but one was for a hundred dollars, sent by the grateful father of a child whose precious life had just been saved through the skill of the doctors and nurses at her own beloved hospital.

Rose almost wept with happiness over them and exclaimed, "Thank God for our unseen friends! Now I'm sure that we are going to be able to buy those sacrificial trees and have our House of Service before winter. We can get them sawed into lumber, *somehow*, but now we more than ever need a team. Oh, whom shall we appeal to next, to purchase a nice pair of Smiling mules for us, Don?"

"How would it do to circularize the whole Democratic Party with a picture of a mule on the appeal? Most people wouldn't know it from a donkey," he suggested, in apparent seriousness.

Camille, too, could not let the occasion slip to beg for the immediate purchase of a hand loom so that she might start some of the older and brighter girls of the neighborhood in lessons in weaving, for she had for days been dying to try out a newly discovered antique pattern for a "Kivver-lid." Omie had taken her for a visit to their old cabin one day, and she had unearthed a hand-hewn log, on the flat surface of which one of the girl's long dead ancestors had notched out the numerical directions for the weaving of one, having doubtless brought them over from old England in the treasure house of memory. Her plea had started Virgil off and he argued the greater need of a printing-press for the boys until Rose had laughingly driven them both from the room, crying, "Oh, why didn't the coal vein extend over the mountain into Webb's Gap? Money, money, thou root of all evil, how we need thee!"

The next afternoon found the group at Smiling Pass considerably scattered. Early in the morning Margaret had set out with Omie for Fayville, both riding borrowed mules. She announced that she needed to make a few minor purchases there and then deposit in the county's only bank the balance of the sum which was her one bridge from Beaten to Boston.

"I may want to go home, sometime," she said. "And father is almost daily threatening by mail to disown his prodigal daughter and cut her off altogether, unless she returns *at once*."

Camille had slipped away into the hills, called thither by the glory of the early September afternoon, although her conscience smote her doubly, first because it meant leaving Donald alone with Smiles, junior—for Rose and John were off on their daily medical round—and then because she had deliberately deserted Philip. He had witnessed her guilty departure and begged permission to accompany her, but she had felt forced to refuse, reminding him of the rule which must not be broken. A Center boy and girl might not be alone together, nor—for the sake of example—might a maid and man, even “uncle” and “niece.” He, in turn, had somewhat sulkily departed on a “frolic of his own.”

A little out of breath from the long, steep climb, but rejoicing in the freedom and the exercise, Camille reached the mountain's top and made her way onto a huge, flat rock which jutted out into space like a natural cornice of gigantic proportions. Portions of its surface were carpeted with thick, soft moss and shaded by cedars deep rooted in its intersecting crevices. It made a wonderful place from which a moonshiner might watch for “revenuers” or a care-free maid view the outstretching beauties of nature. To Camille, native of a land where high hills and tall timber were rarities, the scene held a never-ending charm—the serried mountain summits shading from nearby green through gray and misty lavender to the blue infinity beyond, and far, far below the narrow valley, dotted

with tiny homes, through which the diminished creek wound like a thin silver thread knotted in the middle, where Obie Draughan's primitive mill-dam formed a broader pool.

She laughed as she brandished the stick which had aided her on her ascent, and sent a little lizard with burnished copper head scuttling off a rock which made a natural seat upon which to rest. Dropping upon it, she tossed her shade hat aside and then swiftly unbound the midnight mass of her hair and shook it out until it fell in waves over her shoulders. The faint sighing of the never-failing breeze among the leaves, the occasional notes of a marten or a warbler and the throaty cooing of a hidden turtle dove were the only sounds breaking in upon Nature's majestic silence. The perfect peace of the place which contrasted so strongly with the memoried sounds of war among which so much of her life had been lived, caused a sweet contentment to take possession of her, although it was underlaid with sadness.

A crow's harsh call broke the spell and its repetition in a somewhat unnatural "caw" several times, finally caused her to glance around. Close behind her stood Virgil, smiling boyishly.

Camille sprang to her feet with a startled little cry and her hands flew to her hair in a tardy attempt to restore it to its accustomed smoothness.

"Please don't! It's lovely like that," exclaimed the intruder. "I suppose that I should beg your pardon for sneaking up like that but I couldn't help it."

"You frightened me, Virgie. And you know that you shouldn't have come. The rule . . ."

"Bother the rule. This is a holiday and, besides, I just happened to see you as you climbed up here—I was over on the other hillside helping Marshal Foch hunt a rabbit."

"But I don't like for you to kill the poor little things," protested the girl in a pained voice as Virgil's wiry haired canine companion came bounding noisily through the underbrush and flung himself upon her, registering joy from nose to tail-tip.

"Don't worry. We didn't catch him and I'm so out of practice that I'd miss a rabbit as big as a 'nelephant'—as Rose calls it."

He laid his cap and rifle on the ground and dropped beside her upon the rock seat, lolling back lazily, supported by his outstretched arms. For a while neither spoke content to rest and drink in the beauty of the spot and the day. But it was not long before Camille's conscience disturbed her and she again reminded Virgil of the rule which they had made for the safe guidance of the mountain boys and girls who should later attend the school. A principle was at stake and the girl had been convent-bred.

The man's mind may have agreed, but his heart was a rebel and his tongue was its servant.

"What harm is there in it? We're grown up and there is no one to see us, anyway," he argued. "Besides, you shouldn't have come up here alone. I don't guess there's any danger from animals nowa-

days—there is nothing left but a few foxes and ground hogs—but suppose you had met a rattlesnake? There are plenty of them.”

Camille slightly shuddered and shrank closer to him. The touch of her shoulder against his sent an electric thrill through him and he instinctively moved the hand upon which he was leaning closer so that his arm half encircled her waist. She instantly leaned forward again, while a faint toning of added color appeared on her cheeks. Made the more eager by her action, the lad repeated his own and Camille sprang to her feet.

“But why did you do that, Virgie?” she demanded. “It is not . . . not *comme il faut*.”

The color heightened on her face, from which the hand of time had banished the look of deep-set sorrow in order to restore there-to at last its full meed of girlish sweetness. Her expressive eyes were hidden, however, and Virgil therefore could not read in them her true emotions.

“It was . . . from my standpoint, anyway,” he answered eagerly. “I . . . I don’t see why you should be offended, Camille.”

“And why should I not be offended, then?”

“Camille . . . dear, you know that I wasn’t just . . . just playing. I don’t have to tell you that I care . . . that I . . . I love you, do I? You must have known it, anyway,” he finished, lamely.

For an instant the dark curtain of her lashes was

lifted, and her wonderful eyes seemed to him to be filled with a tenderness which made his heart rejoice and hope.

"It's true, Camille," he hurried on, seizing the plump but shapely little hand which hung by her side; the other was pressed to her breast. "I reckon that I've loved you ever since that first time I saw you, at Fayville. Every fellow says the same, I guess, when he comes to ask a girl to . . . to marry him, but honestly I mean it, dear."

He stood up and for a third time attempted to take her in his embrace but she evaded him, saying hastily, "But, Virgil, surely you . . . you are not now asking me to marry you. Are we not, then, of friends the best? But for marriage—in America, at least—is not . . . not love necessary?"

"Yes, and I *do* love you, as much as any man could love a girl. I can offer you that, although you know, as well as I, how little else at present. But isn't love the *real* thing in marriage?"

"It is, I think, the only thing," she replied, gently. "Of the rest I think not at all, for what have I? I am but a poor orphan, with no station."

"Then you will . . . I mean you do care?" he cried, catching her to him.

"No, no, Virgie! I care, yes. Have we not been like brother and sister? But that you must not do. I do not wish for marriage."

He dropped his arms instantly and stepped back while a shadow darkened the eager light in his eyes

as his thoughts flowed into the customary channel taken by those of youth when love has been rejected. What could be more illogical, yet more natural, than for a man to assume instantly that, if a woman refuses *him*, it must be because she loves another, when his mind has been lacerated by the harrow of love and so made ready for the quick-growing seeds of suspicion and jealousy?

"You don't want to marry me because you love Philip! It's the truth, isn't it?" he demanded.

"I have not said so, and why should you think it?"

Indignation was at least in part the cause of the new flush which spread over her countenance.

"But it is true," he persisted, with a note of bitterness in his voice. "You do care for him."

"Of course I do. Why, then, should I not? Does he not call himself my uncle?"

"Rot! I've been calling you 'sister,' but that hasn't kept me from loving you in an entirely different way. It's the same with you and him. I've seen him looking at you."

"He doesn't," flashed the girl.

"Yes, he does. I'm not blaming him—he'd be a fool not to . . . not to love you, I reckon. And I guess that I can't blame you, either," he added, in a tone in which self-commiseration and a brave attempt to appear generous, intermingled. "I'm just a poor mountaineer; he's got *everything*. And he really is a corking fellow . . . only, well . . ."

There was a new tender appeal in Camille's voice

as she quickly replied, "But you are wrong, Virgie. I do not think of him . . . that way, either. Am I not happy with Rose and Donald and in my work? I do not wish to marry anyone, yet."

"All right. Let's forget, then—only remember that I am going to keep right on loving you and wanting you, always, Camille," he added with boyish contradiction.

"That I cannot help, perhaps. But please tell me that we are still to be friends, as before, *n'est-ce pas, mon ami?*"

"Sure," Virgil responded with unnecessary boisterousness. He hesitated a moment, then offered her his hand as a pledge.

Smiling a little, Camille took it, demurely.

"I guess we had better go down, now," she said.

The youth agreed. While she was restoring her hair to its customary neatness and putting on her attractive shade hat he turned away and walked to the extreme edge of the out-jutting rock, where he stood, statuesquely outlined against the summer sky, lithe yet sturdy, a virile appealing form. Somehow he felt that it was more than he could do to watch her in that simple yet intimate little performance. She glanced up and saw him standing in his perilous position and her heart stopped for an instant. Then she ran forward, seized his hand and drew him back, pleased yet rebelling. Like many another youth, he exclaimed, "Pshaw, there's no danger. Besides, you wouldn't care if I should go over."

"Is it not a very silly Virgil, then! Of course I should care, very much. But come."

Down the steep mountainside, climbing over rocks and fallen logs, breasting leafy boughs and impeding underbrush, they ran and slid, much of the time hand in hand and laughing merrily. Once, however, the girl's gay laughter turned, abruptly, to a little shriek as they all but trod upon a full grown rattlesnake, contentedly sunning itself in an open glade. She clutched Virgil's arm so violently that he missed a perfectly easy shot, and the snake slipped swiftly into the tall grass with an angry hiss and disappeared, unscathed. For some time thereafter she clung tightly to his hand and he offered up a silent prayer of gratitude to the creature God had cursed.

Just as the two emerged from the final fringe of the forest above the House of Happiness they came face to face with Malvary Amos who had likewise been hunting in the hills. The younger lad's dark face took on a sneering expression, and he drawled, "Seems like the rule you're always preachin' abaout haint in force—when you don't want hit tew be, Virgie. Ef me and Omie hed been up thar together . . . "

"That's enough," retorted the other, and Camille saw the cords in his neck grow suddenly taut with his effort to control himself. "Rule or no rule Omie's my sister and I've told you to leave her alone."

Malvary's black eyes narrowed and burned angrily. But he merely gave utterance to a sarcastic



“ HE DID NOT INSTANTLY RELEASE HER ”

laugh, and turned abruptly away. Virgil muttered an expletive under his breath and the girl laid her hand imploringly on his arm.

"But, no, Virgie. We have done wrong," she said, generously sharing the blame, "And look! There are Smiles and John; they have seen us, too."

She pointed down towards the creek where the man and woman were on the point of crossing from the further side over a series of natural stepping stones, the final one of which was some distance from the bank. They saw John leap and then turn to Rose, encouragingly. She followed and he caught her. There was nothing actually partaking of an embrace in the position of his arms, yet he did not instantly release her, and Virgil exclaimed, "I wish that John hadn't come!"

"But why? Is he not of great help to us?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but . . . I don't like it. We're personally good friends, and he's a fine fellow in spite of his moodiness, but I'm getting worried. Don't you think yourself that he is in love with Rose, Camille?"

"No! Why, he can't be," she cried in distress.

"Nothing easier in the world. It would be more strange if he wasn't for she's the most wonderful, dearest woman in . . ." he stopped, stammering a little, but Camille promptly and positively agreed, only to add however, "But she is married to Donald and loves him with all her heart."

"Of course I'm not saying that she cares for him

—that way—although I know that she likes him tremendously, and they're together a lot. But if he is in love with her, it may make trouble; for himself, anyway. Do you know, I have an idea that Donald thinks the same as I do. I've seen him look kind of troubled sometimes."

"No, no. It isn't so," protested the girl, positively.

But it was, even at that very moment. Never for an instant doubting his wife, a new pain had been added to Donald's more than full quota. Try as he would to be cheerful and companionable, the bitterness bred of his physical anguish increased daily, and he knew that his irritability must in time have its effect even on Smiles' wonderful love for him. There was he, chair-ridden, no longer a suitable mate for a woman filled to the brim with abounding life and activity. And there, with her almost constantly, was a man radiating mental and physical force, deeply interested in the things in which she was bound up, body and soul. And that man worshiped her! How long could his strong sense of honor hold his passion within due bounds, and silence the call of his heart?

The four trampers reached the veranda simultaneously, and turned to look toward the creek road whence at that moment had come a hail in Omie's vigorous young voice.

Startled surprise cut short their answering hails. For Omie was riding towards them alone, and leading by the bridle the second of the borrowed mules.

Into the mind of each sprang the thought, "Could Margaret have been hurt?" and there came an even sharper little clutch at Rose's heart as—for just an instant—she harbored the further thought, "Could her trip to Fayville have been a subterfuge merely, and she have deserted them, after all?"

All four ran down the steps and the steep path toward the gate, at which Omie had already dismounted with the freedom of a boy. Philip likewise came hastening to join them, down the creek road. But, before a question could be voiced by any of them, their attention was arrested by the appearance of a strange-looking vehicle around the nearby bend in the road. Drawn by a pair of sleek young mules was the skeleton underbody of a jolt wagon with an up-ended soap box attached to the front axle for an improvised seat. And on it was Margaret, clad in a thin muslin waist, expensively tailored divided skirt, and tan shoes and silk stockings—all badly splashed and bedraggled. Her golden hair was flying in every direction in shimmering wisps and her hat was over one ear, but the everlasting jouncing had not banished the merry smile from her lovely face. She waved her hand gaily to them, but its firm grasp was instantly needed on the reins, for the mules, whose home was a few miles further up the creek, had broken into a smart trot. In vain she tried to stop them, crying "Whoa" incessantly. For home they were bound, and so like a feminine John Gilpin, she bounced past the amazed group clustered in the open gateway.

"Head them into the creek, Margaret!" shouted Virgil, as both he and Philip sprang in pursuit. She obeyed, pulling on the left rein with all her might and the necessity of stepping down among the boulders caused the animals to slow down and stop.

"Margaret, what on earth does this mean?" demanded Rose in utter bewilderment, as the strange outfit finally drew up beside her.

As Philip reached up his long arms and bodily swung the girl to the ground she waved a dramatic hand and cried, "Behold, my ticket home! If I ever go, now, I'll have to walk or drive these. Can you imagine the prodigal daughter riding up historic Beacon Street thus?" She laughed merrily.

"But . . . but you aren't going to tell us . . .?" Rose stopped from sheer incredulity.

"You wished for a team, behold a fairy has waved her golden wand and here it is—most of it, at least. They're mine—*our's* I mean—or will be when the other seven-eighths of their purchase price is paid. I bought them 'a dollar down and a dollar a week for life', tra-la-la."

"Oh, please be serious, Margaret."

"But I am—almost, anyway. The little dears were standing right in front of the bank, just begging to be bought, and their owner was in a selling state of mind, except that he couldn't be persuaded to part with the body of the wagon—it was his own invention and he had made it himself—so I bought it without, for ~~fifty~~ dollars on account, and the

balance when he catches me, although the agreement and note which your friend the lawyer drew up, says thirty-days, like a police court sentence. Aren't they the darlings?" Margaret fondled the two velvety black noses and chattered on, "The thought of owning them is ever so much more exhilarating than having a ticket on that horrible railroad or money in the bank."

"You perfectly darling girl, come here and kiss me!" Rose's eyes were mistily luminous and there was a tremulous smile on her lips. "We'll pay for them—somehow."

"We will; if I have to pawn my rings by mail in order to do it."

"Margaret, you're a brick!" exclaimed Philip.

CHAPTER VIII

AUNT LISSY'S "FORTUNES"

SAVE for the occasional mooing of a vagrant cow, the grunting of many pigs, and the pattering of intermittent showers upon the roofs, Sabbath peace and quiet reigned in Smiling Pass. Virgil and the three girls had ridden up to "Devil's Fork" to attend the "preachin'" in the little schoolhouse there—Margaret and Camille principally out of curiosity, it must be confessed—and the other four adults of the household, together with the baby, who was asleep, were severally engaged in the living room-office.

Rose was bending happily over some long-postponed mending, an amused smile playing about the corners of her sensitive lips as her thoughts reverted to Margaret's dramatic arrival on the evening before. Looking up from the portable typewriter which stood upon a board stretched across the arms of his chair, Donald saw it and smiled sympathetically. Then, with a smothered sigh, he returned his gaze to the keys which he was pounding with two of his big fingers, trained to the most delicate surgery. There was a large pile of envelopes still to be addressed to possible helpers, and he had volunteered

for the work. His wife's attentive ears caught the sound of the sigh and it was echoed in her heart. Oh, the pity of it all! She glanced sympathetically at him.

John Hunter was, as usual, deep in the study of a medical treatise upon the margin of which he was making frequent notes, for discussion with Donald later. Philip stood looking out of the window, dreaming. It was his last day in the House of Happiness. and he was anything but happy.

At length Rose tossed her sewing upon the table and exclaimed, "I shall simply die if I don't get out-of-doors for a little while. Wouldn't you like to go out on the porch, Don?"

"Like to well enough, but can't yet. This bunch must get off tomorrow," answered her husband.

"Let it go. I'll finish it bye and bye."

"'Bye and bye' you'll have a hundred and one other things to do, and you know it. Besides, it's my job—about the only kind of thing I'm qualified for now."

His words were clipped short and carried the tang of bitterness. Rose went to his side and lightly laid her hand across his mouth. He pushed it petulantly away, then seized it almost passionately and pressed it back against his lips. John did not lift his eyes from the page, but his straight lips drew still closer together.

"I'm sorry, Smiles," apologized Donald. "I know I'm beastly company to-day. I'll tell you;

Philip has been wanting you to take him up to visit your much-commented-on Aunt Lissy, why don't you do it now? I guess that she's the only one anywhere up and down the creek whom he hasn't met, and she must be a wonder, if one can believe *half* the things which you say about her."

"She is, Don. Why, if it had been her lot to be born higher up the social scale she would be an undisputed leader in society, or in something else. I wish that you could see her."

"Yes, let's go, Rose—if Donald doesn't mind being left alone for a few minutes," said Philip, turning abruptly from the window.

"Not a bit . . . I'm used to it," added the other man under his breath, and his wife's face grew sad again.

"Would you like to come, too, John?" she asked, for the sake of politeness, more than half hoping that he would refuse.

"Thanks." Dr. Hunter methodically closed his book and stood up, towering above the other two.

Rose bent and tenderly kissed the silver patch above her husband's temple, then ran into their bedroom to don coat and tam-o-shanter while the two men went to their own quarters for raincoats. Then they set briskly off down the creek and, as they were about to pass out of sight of the house, Rose turned and waved her hand. Donald returned her parting salute and then leaned back in his cushioned chair, the smile which he had con-

sciously summoned to his lips fading away into lines of pain.

"Oh, *God!* To walk like that again!" He spoke through clenched teeth.

Rose commanded them to stop at Judd's half-constructed store, which was open and already doing business in a few staples, saying, "We must buy a twist or two of strong chewing 'terbacker,' Phil. It may or may not be true that the way to a man's heart is through his digestive cavity, but it certainly is that the course to Aunt Lissy's confidence is through her few remaining 'chawin' teeth."

Philip made the purchase, following Judd's suggestion as to brand. Thrusting the cruller-like, dry, brown twist into the side pocket of his outing jacket, he remarked, "What a filthy habit this chewing is. Why don't you try to stop it?"

"Might as well attempt to stop them from eating hog and hominy," responded John, bluntly; but Rose was not fully in accord.

"As to the older generation, yes, John; but our boys and girls will not chew when they grow up, and you know the force of example. It is filthy, of course, although they insist that smoking is worse; but, if they get any comfort and enjoyment from it, we shouldn't condemn them too severely, remembering their bringing-up. I despise it, and yet I can't begrudge them that simple pleasure; heaven knows that they have few enough joys."

"I suppose that you're right, Smiles," agreed Philip. "But to see women—*old* women, who seem as though they should resemble Grandma Bentley and be sweet and gentle"

"*'Old* women'? There aren't any in these mountains, or only a very few. Someone, I've forgotten who it was, put the truth in an apt paradox: 'the old women are all dead and the young women all old.' It's true. They are merely bearers of burdens and children, Philip—pack animals. Why, I've seen Aunt Lissy herself plowing her steep mountainside farm, teamed up with a mule, and, if you're ever here at harvest-time, you'll see almost all of them plodding down these hills at eventide, after laboring all day in the corn fields, with their patient backs bent double beneath the weight of heavy sacks of corn. Do you wonder that they look old at thirty, when they work like that, besides getting married at fifteen or sixteen and having annual babies? I don't; but—God helping us—the younger generation will be different."

For a little further they walked on in silence down the rough and muddy cart-path, single-file. Rose continued in front and John, close behind her, kept his piercing gray eyes fixed almost hungrily on the nape of her neck, where a straying curl was fast becoming begemmed with rain-drops which beat in beneath her tam. Suddenly she stopped and pointed up the hillside to a patch of green in which a bare-foot man was hoeing, calling back to Philip, "That

—if you don't already know it—is 'sang,' Philip. You won't find the name in your dictionary, though—it's our mountain corruption for 'gin seng.' They used to grow lots of it hereabouts, and found a highly profitable market for it, most of it going eventually to China, of course. But there's little now; it was too much work to raise it." She sighed then added the information, "The native rule for growing 'sang' is two parts shade and one part sunshine—like the life in these hills."

"Tell me something about this witch-doctor of yours. I'd like to have the background before I see her," suggested Philip, as the path broadened and they fell in step, side by side again.

"Well, although she's in some respects typical of her generation, she's also exceptional, as you will see for yourself. She says that her grandpappy came from old Virginia, and if you don't declare that you find traces of a 'F. F. V.' ancestry in her face I shall never forgive you. Her man was in the civil war—she is also exceptional in being fairly old, you see—and later he spent some years in the penitentiary. While he was 'away' she earned a meager living for herself and her numerous brood by traveling all over the county with a old 'yarb' doctor, as his assistant and nurse, leaving the children at home with enough food for two or three weeks, but otherwise to shift for themselves."

"The dickens!" interpolated her brother.

"Isn't it pathetic? But that was her only live-

lihood, and was made necessary by the way sickness was—and still is to some extent, for that matter—taken care of in these mountains. The native doctor or nurse simply goes and camps at the cabin of the sick person, along with as many volunteers from among the near neighbors as can come, until the patient gets well.”

“Or dies,” added John.

“Exactly. It seems incredible to one trained as we have been, Phil, but they pack in like that, and it is also a favorite courting time for young couples, who will ‘sit up’ together and carry on their low-voiced love-making before the fire while the rest either considerably stay outdoors or go to sleep where they can on the floor.”

“I don’t blame the patient for dying!” exclaimed her brother.

“Nor I. Well, Aunt Lissy used to go like that from cabin to cabin when the call came, receiving as payment for her expert services bags of corn and the like, which she would tote back home on her shoulder when she thought that the children’s larder must be getting low. I’ll never forget a story that Joshuy—her middle-aged youngest boy who still lives with her—told me, a few days ago, about the way those pitiable kiddies once started out a-foot, led, perhaps, by the hand of God in their pathetic pilgrimage over the hills, in search of their mother. They stopped nights at whatever cabin they chanced to reach, and one evening, weary of heart and their

little bare feet bruised and bleeding, they fairly stumbled upon the home where she was staying. I can't attempt to tell the story as he did—poor sub-norinal creature—but it was heart-breaking."

"Evangeline," said Philip, softly.

Rose turned and started across the creek. The rain had swelled its shallow waters until they covered the stepping-stones almost ankle-deep, but she splashed on, unconcernedly, and the men followed. A brief but strenuous climb up a trodden path brought them to a paling fence in a dilapidated condition. Within it a mongrel dog bristled and growled, a black pig grunted, and a huge white gander craned his neck and hissed hostility through wide-opened orange beak, until a man slouched out of the door of the cabin and flung a stick in their midst.

"That's Joshuy," said Rose, and added in a low voice, "Isn't the setting perfect? If she could only move it near some city she could make enough in a year, telling automobilists' fortunes, to ride in a motor car herself."

She laughed at the ludicrousness of the mind picture which her remarks invoked, and was interrupted by an exclamation from Philip.

"Great Scott, did you hear that?" he demanded.

A rooster had just finished a challenging cock-a-doodle-do, and the dog had thrown his head into the air and emitted a howl which was an almost perfect imitation of it.

Rose laughed again. "Aunt Lissy's 'haound

dawg' is also locally famous because of that very accomplishment," she explained, and Joshua grinned, toothlessly, calling, "Come in. He won't hurt you."

They entered the open door to the one room which was all the house, and complied with the man's further invitation to seat themselves on the low, home-made stool chairs before the fire. Smiles immediately fell into conversation with the old woman sitting there, on the subject of her sore leg. But the shuddering fascination of these mountain cabins' picturesque squalor had not yet worn off for Philip, and for a moment he gazed about him at the windowless interior with its two wall bunks covered with dirty, rumpled quilts, the cluttered up board table, and the strips of rags, strings of dried beans and pieces of yellow kershaw which hung from the rafters.

Then he turned his look upon the gaunt, bent, yet striking figure of the old woman, now alternately flipping up a corn cake cooking upon an old spider set among the coals, and unwinding the bandage about her bare leg in order that she might exhibit the nearly healed sores to her nurse. Her face, beneath a red bandana handkerchief from the confines of which straggling locks of gray hair protruded, struck and retained his interest, for it was as Rose had said. Despite the fact that it was nearly toothless, and the corners of its mouth stained with tobacco juice, Aunt Lissy's countenance was almost patrician in the strength and regularity of its fea-

tures and in the wonderful, deep-set eyes which, as they dilated and narrowed, seemed to glow like coals. It was the face of a true pioneer.

"Hit's dewin' right well, madam." Their hostess was speaking in a steady voice, tuned to the open places and still commanding. "I reckon thet you hev cured me and I loves you fer hit. I'll always love you, and ef we don't never see each other again in this world I hopes tew meet you in Heaven." She paused to expectorate into the fire and Joshua, who had reseated himself and was unconcernedly whetting a knife, followed suit. "Who mought the other furriner be thet you hve brung with you?" she demanded with startling abruptness.

"This is my brother, Dr. Bentley."

"You're welcome; all uv Mistress MacDonal's friends air welcome hyar. Hev you cum from aout in the U-nited States, too?"

Philip looked a bit surprised but Rose quickly answered for him.

"Yes, Aunt Lissy. He is from up North in Boston—where I lived, you know. This is Aunt Lissy's son—Joshuy," she added by way of introduction. Philip gave a friendly nod, and the mountaineer grinned.

"Yes, sir. Joshuy hyar, he's my least one," said the old woman, leaning forward with her thin elbows on her knees and her scrawny hands extended to the fire. "I hev fifteen childrun, sir, three uv 'em livin' and the rest startin' a little home fer me in Heaven.

I don't guess thet hit'll be long a-fore I air movin' on tew j'ine them thar."

"Oh, no, Aunt Lissy," Rose hastened to interrupt and added, with a significant glance towards Philip, "You have someone taking care of you now; you know who I mean."

"Yes, I knows. But you hadn't better talk abaout *him*—the gentlemen mought be skeered; you mought be."

"Oh, I don't believe so—not very scared, anyway. Doctors aren't easily frightened, and I was in the war, you remember."

"You kaint tell me nothin' abaout *war*." Aunt Lissy's voice rang out challengingly. "My pappy and my man was in one, and I knows all abaout hit. Yes, madame, and I kin shoot a gun better'n any man on this hyar creek, and I knows haow tew fix a bay'net, and *charge!*" As she spoke her eyes flashed and her corded arms carried out a dramatic pantomime of throwing a rifle to her shoulder, then whipping a bayonet from her belt, affixing it and thrusting it home. "And I knows haow tew form a line uv battle, and when tew hev the drums rolled to kivver up the cries uv the waounded."

Rose shuddered, thinking of France. Then she cajoled, "But you were going to tell us about the time you saw the devils through the cracks of the floor, Aunt Lissy."

"I war and I will. What I aims tew tell you air the gospel truth, gentlemen, and I expects you tew

believe hit, fer hit's so." Her son grinned again and gave a broad wink, whereon his mother shrieked, "You hush, Joshuy! Hit *air*."

She looked at her visitors and continued earnestly, "I hed been a-lyin' powerful sick fer nigh ontew five y'ars on thet very bed, thar . . ."

"But, Aunt Lissy," Smiles broke in, "you can cure other folks; why . . .?"

"I allows thet I can—I hev cured a powerful heap uv 'em; sometimes with yarbs, sometimes by faith, whar they hed the faith tew believe in my power. But thet time I couldn't aid myself. You know thet hit war said uv Him thet hung upon the sturdy tree uv the cross, 'He saved others, Hisself He could not save,' and I reckon hit was like-a thet with me. Leastwise, thar I lay, nigh untew dead . . ."

She paused, passed the back of her hand across her lips and then began to fumble in the pocket of her soiled, ragged skirt with its many patches. Rose motioned to Philip, and he produced the two twists of dark tobacco leaves and offered them, saying, "Perhaps you, or your son, use this, Aunt Lissy."

"I does," promptly replied the old woman, her bony hand anticipating Joshua's. "What's your price fer hit?"

"No price at all—at least, your hospitality more than pays for it. I just happened to get it when I was buying some smokes."

"Then ef you *smoke*, I don't reckon thet you *use* terbacker. Me, I don't smoke much except once in

a while jest a-fore I goes tew bed. Hit sorter stops the hankerin' fer a chaw, if you wake up in the night, whatever."

She took a generous bite of the twist, and continued.

"Wall, one mornin' es I war a-layin' thar I opened my eyes and saw . . . somethin' . . . I don't know what, big and white a-standin' over me. Hit hed eyes es big es pewter plates and they war all full uv flashes. I tell you, madame, I war more skeered *then* than ever I hed been in all my life. I shore thought my time hed cum."

"And no wonder," agreed Philip, seriously.

"Hit warn't; nary a bit, sir. Wall, I started fer tew set up, but hit pushed me back and said, 'Lay doawn, thar, Lissy. I hev cum tew take keer uv you.' Thet's what hit said, madame, and I'm tellin' you the gospel truth."

"Do you think that . . . that the Lord sent it?" asked Rose, as breathlessly in earnest as though she had not heard it all before.

"Certainly He done hit, madame.. Wall, I lied back, weaklike, with my eyes closed. Then I looked agin. Shore enough thar hit stood, big and white, with hits great eyes a-flashin'. Then I seed more eyes a-flashin' up through all the cracks uv the floor, thar. Thar war hundreds uv them and I war more skeered yet, but hit said, 'You lay daown thar, Lissy. I won't let 'em hurt you,' and hit began tew lash et them with a whip thet hed spikes in hit, es

long es this." She measured off some three inches between her two bent and blackened fore-fingers, adding, "And hit druv them way, screechin' terribul."

The girl was ready with her next leading question. "But you aren't afraid of it anymore, are you, Aunt Lissy?"

"No, madame; hit's my friend. I can call hit tew me when I needs hit, and sometimes hit comes in different shapes—like a man walkin' up the creek when I'm a-hoein' in the gyarden. Hit'll cum up and shake hands with me, but hit kaint fool *me*. I knows hit by hits eyes, and then hit laughs, 'ha, ha, ha!'" Her imitation was rather sepulchral.

"By Jove, that's interesting," said Philip, heartily, and his sister agreed, adding insinuatingly, "Don't you think that you might tell the doctor's fortune before we go, Aunt Lissy? I'm sure that he'd like to have you."

"I'll dew hit ef he likes, madame."

"Well, rather!" Philip agreed.

"I can tell hit two ways—by the inner eye, or you can make your own."

Rose explained in a whisper that the latter method necessitated his drinking tea with her, in which case she would read the leaves and Philip, with a concealed grimace, hastily responded, "We can stay only a few minutes more, Aunt Lissy. The 'inner eye' will be quicker and probably just as good. Suppose you try that way."

The old woman turned and stared fixedly at him

with her left eye, the while slowly rubbing the closed lid of her right with her grimy fore-finger.

"I air a-studin' your fortune, naow," she said. "Ef you haint long tew stay I don't aim tew tell you the past, fer you knows hit already. But I kin see that you're a man uv larnin,' sir. Yes, you hev a fine head-piece, and knows a powerful heap uv things, I can see thet. And you makes a heap uv money—and spends hit, too."

Philip smiled and nodded in rueful agreement.

"You're a fine, up-standin' young man and every-one loves you. Thar's one woman thet loves you right smart, but you don't keer much fer her, yet. No, naow you loves two women a little, and kaint seem tew choose a-tween 'em, but you hev got tew dew hit, someday."

The man started and colored a trifle, despite his effort to laugh and appear unconcerned, whereupon Aunt Lissy chuckled, throatily, and continued, "I could describe 'em tew you, but maybe you'd rather I wouldn't whilst the others are hyar."

"Yes, better not," laughed Rose. "He might be embarrassed."

"Horribly! I'll come again, alone, and find out who the two charmers are, for I'm sure that I don't know, myself."

"I reckon you dew, sir," grinned the woman. "But you cum again and see ef I haint right. Do you want me tew tell your fortune, too?" she demanded, turning with startling abruptness to Dr. Hunter.

"I should be glad to have you," answered John, in his deep, even voice.

"I haint so sartain uv thet, sir. I don't guess you'd love fer me tew tell abaout your past right naow and I won't. But I could, sir, I could." She nodded slowly. "You work harder than the other gentleman, but you don't succeed so well; and you loves harder, but hit haint no use. Thar haint never been but one woman in your heart, and she haint fer you, and she haint never goin' tew be fer you. She belongs tew another."

Rose's effort not to show her quick distress was futile. She felt the hot flush spreading over her neck and face, and was afraid even so much as to glance at John; but, although she kept her eyes steadily fixed on the fire, she could sense the sudden tension in the man's big frame and her heart cried out, for instinct told her that his soul was being pilloried. "Yes, you loves her right smart," the woman droned on. "But she don't love you, although she's your friend and always will be your friend, cum what may. The love witches ride you often—they rid you last night. I can charm 'em away, 'though, ef you have faith in my power—you've got tew hev faith." Without waiting for permission she leaned forward and placed her sooty, clawlike forefinger on Dr. Hunter's forehead. Slowly, seriously, she circled it three times about each of his eyes and ran it up and down and across the bridge of his nose. Then her fingers leaped to his hair and pulled it sharp-

ly in several places. Satisfied, she leaned back and remarked, "They're gone, but you musn't wash or brush your hair until ten o'clock to-morrow morning, or hit'll sp'ile the charm."

He nodded, looking a little foolish, and she went on, "Yes, you hev hed grave trouble in the past, sir, and the future is darker yet. Thar's more trouble afore you—and blood. I see a dark young man . . ."

Rose sprang to her feet. "*Please*, Aunt Lissy! That's enough for to-day," she cried.

"It's a damned sight too much," muttered Philip, who was becoming most uncomfortable.

"I . . . I . . . It's time we were getting back to the Pass," continued the girl, unhappiness alike in her face and voice.

The fortune-teller started a little, and her set countenance relaxed.

In a more natural tone she remarked, "Dew stay."

"We can't—not now, Aunt Lissy. You come over with us."

"No, I kaint. You-all stay hyar; stay the night."

"We've got to go, dear. But we'll come again, all of us. Of course I mean to keep on coming almost every day, until your leg is healed. I hope that we haven't bothered you."

"No, you haint disfurnished me none. I love tew hev folks drap in hyar. Wal, ef you-all kaint stay I'll tell you 'good-bye.' You air a good woman and I'd like tew buss your hand, fer I loves you." Philip

was startled, for the old English word meaning "to kiss" was not in his vocabulary, but he understood as Aunt Lissy bent and touched Rose's palm gently with her lips.

Smiles patted their hostess' gnarled hand affectionately and he did likewise, saying, "I'm sure that I shall come when I return next year, Aunt Lissy."

"I hopes so, fer I loves you better'n any furriner I ever seed, sir. Yes, madame, your brother air the mixin'est man I hev ever met up with."

"I'm so glad that you like him, Aunt Lissy, for he really is a dear," smiled his sister and she slipped her hand into Philip's and hastily drew him towards the door. Once out of ear-shot she turned to the other man, and exclaimed, "Oh, John, I'm so sorry about that silly fortune-telling!"

Dr. Hunter laughed—it was a short laugh, without mirth, and his lips did not smile. "Don't give it a thought. Of course none of us really believe the ravings of that poor cracked-brain."

"Not even what she said about Phil?" demanded Rose, eager to give the affair a lighter turn.

"Well, about *him*, yes, perhaps. Certainly he got the full value of his chewing tobacco, in appreciation."

PART III
THROUGH SHADOW TO SUNSHINE

CHAPTER I

IN RETROSPECT

"SMILING PASS *Post Office* (Note that, sir!)

Philip, dear:

These are sealed orders from your (sister) superior, and not to be treated as lightly as was my humble invitation last summer. The idea of anyone preferring the battle fields of France to those of the Cumberlands for a vacation, as you did a year ago! This time I will positively not take no for an answer. To quote Virgil, who is everlastingly dinning the words into the ears of the little boys, 'Don't make excuses. Make Good!'—and come for a few days, even if you cannot take your full vacation so early.

But I am forgetting my orders:

'Sir: You will report for pleasure at Smiling Pass, in the Land of the Saddlebags on (or before) Easter Sunday, March the 27th, 1921.'

You *must* come, Philip. It is an anniversary and all sorts of things are going to happen. Two years ago, on that memorable date, we arrived in the hills; two months to a day later the first cedar post which supports the northeast corner of the House of Happiness was put in place, and this year we dedicate the fine new Community building—the House of Friendliness—and what more fitting opening could we have than a sacred service on Easter, the day when we especially commemorate a new and broader vision?

To tell the truth, I had to fight for it against an almost united Council, for Judd was more bitterly opposed to me than ever before and Virgil, strangely enough, agreed with him. You see some of the narrow 'Reg'lar Ol' Babtists' still retain their misguided hostility to us and one, picturesquely known as Preacher Stammerin' Sam, has taken our many mistakes as occasions for bitter tirades against us. Judd has been wild—he wants the right to criticize, but will permit it to no one else—and he fought hard against letting them hold a service here. But I maintained that, if we refuse to open our doors with Christian charity, our enemies will have a right to draw the conclusion which many of them have drawn, without any justification, and call us heathens or apostles of some false doctrine. Of course, there is much in the way that they practice religion to which I object, but it *is* their faith and they have a right to have their children brought up in it. The Easter preachin' is to be held at Smiling Pass in the new House of Friendliness, built through the generosity of graduates of *your* college, and thanks in no small measure to you, my dear. It will interest you, for it's a far cry from St. Paul's in Boston to an old fashioned Baptist preachin' in Beaten. Come and see.

Nor is that the only 'feature' scheduled for our Spring Opening. On May Day . . . but again, 'Come and see.'

I've shamefully neglected my personal correspondence since coming here and you have good reason for complaint—and I an equally good excuse. Now, in retrospect it seems to me two centuries since you rode so gallantly out of the picture, on one of Margaret's sleek mules, and I can hardly wait to see you again.

But in the actual living, each new day has seemed ended before it was half begun, for every one has been so filled with a multitude of events that they fairly crowded the precious moments out. 'Who's making excuses now, and hackneyed ones at that?' I hear you say. They are true, but if I did not know that Camille and Margaret had—the former with commendable regularity and the latter occasionally—joined in making vicarious atonement for my sins of omission, I should be penitent indeed.

However, our letters in conjunction, plus the pamphleted appeals—copies of which have always been sent you and never in vain—must have given you a fair idea of how matters have progressed with us in these two short years; at least in a material way. Still, I'll wager that you will hardly know us. When you left, our institution was just an infant at the creepy-crawly age, like Smiles, junior. It has not quite kept pace with her, for she, the darling, is running everywhere on her two plump little legs; but it has at least struggled to its knees, the proper posture for prayer, alike of thanksgiving and for future blessings. Now, if our ever-growing number of helpful friends will only continue to lend their support until some millionaire catches the vision's gleam and endows us with the financial strength to arise and stride goalward, even though the road be as rough as our other mountain paths, all will be well. Please become a millionaire, Philip!

We talk big in our 'literature'—it would never do to frighten away a single dollar by so much as a hint to a contributing friend that the sawmill, the printing-press, the hand looms, the boys' and girls' dormitories, the dining hall, etc., ad. inf. were nothing but dream things, existing only in our enthusiastic

imaginations. That is all they were, once, yet they are actualities, now, bought or built upon faith, hope and charity—charity which has eventually paid one hundred cents on the dollar for each and every one of them. Oh, we have played our part in the prevailing wave of crime and purchased a multitude of needed things on credit, having no real assurance that we would *ever* get the money with which to pay for them.

And now the mountainside is fairly blossoming with a pale yellow cluster of buildings, big and little, constructed of new boards which two years ago were hidden deep in the hearts of mighty trees, a-waiting the thud of the choppers' axes and the screech of the first steam saw-mill in the county to call them into being for the service of mankind. In their midst still stand the House of Happiness and the House of Health—their original progenitors—although they have had many a storm within and without to weather. Each remains true to its name, the former more than ever, for Donald has been *materially* better this past year, so much so that I have often wondered at his being willing to remain, but not a word does he say about leaving now. The task has gripped and held him, as it has all of us. Of course, he is not fully well, he is forced to walk with a limp and a cane and any over-exertion or prolonged wet spell sends him back to his chair of pain. I wonder if an operation forcibly to stretch the sciatic nerve might not now be beneficial?

As for myself, why should I not be happy, with Junie the healthiest, happiest, prettiest and brightest baby that ever lived (there, who's a proud parent!), Donald more and more frequently his old adorable

self, and the rest the best associates that woman ever worked with in a wonderful cause.

Virgil is all that he gave youthful promise of being; need more be said? The boys follow him, in vocational work and play, with almost fanatic fervor, and our teams clean up—that is the right expression, isn't it?—in every kind of sport.

But if they admire him, they worship Margaret. And no wonder. Her civic organization and clubs are positively inspirational. Whenever I get a tiny bit blue I slip down to a meeting of the Little Boys' Club and they restore my flagging faith, with their manliness and enthusiasm. They are indeed true 'Knights of the Smile.' You may have read the story of the change in her between the lines of her letters, but could have only in part. Wait, and you'll see it. All the mountaineers love her as much as we do; she is so sweet, so friendly, so deeply purposeful under her merry exterior and so charitable—in the true sense of the word.

So I might go on, enthusing over Camille, the beloved big sister of all our girls; and John—he is as unchanged and unchanging as the hills themselves, and as dependable; and Omie, who has grown into an utterly fascinating young lady, as full of moods as the month of April, perhaps, but as welcome—she takes the lead in everything from pranks to prayers; and 'Mally' who is as swift in thought and action as his uncle Judd is slow—by all odds our most capable boy in school and work—and at the same time a perpetual worry. One never knows where he is going to break out next, and he and Virgil are still at swords points most of the time. I am writing humorously, but it is no jesting matter. Only last week we had to lecture him severely and

then discipline him by taking away all his privileges, because he smuggled his rifle into his room—a thing which is, of course, absolutely 'taboo.'

Oh, it is a merry life, each moment bringing a new problem which needs must be grasped with an iron hand in a velvet glove.

But it is worth all the work and worry, Philip. It would be, if we were merely serving our immediate neighbors and helping to make their drab lives a little brighter by supplying medical attention, teaching those who crave knowledge to read and write, and giving them better clothing at purely nominal prices, thanks to the generous gifts which we receive. For they are responsive and friendly, in the main, now, although occasionally things go wrong—often from what seems like the most trivial cause. And then the school is blamed, of course; there are again sullen looks and flurries of open hostility when we have to call on good preacher Paul to spread the oil of conciliation on the troubled waters of Beaten Creek, and on Bad Bill to stand guard for a few nights over the sawmill for the sake of our temporal safety. That poor mill seems to have to bear the brunt of everything. Already its tin smoke-stack has twice been riddled by bullets, its boiler once almost blown up by cartridges hidden therein, and its saw utterly ruined by spikes driven in logs waiting to be made into boards.

But we merely smile and go on! All that, light and shadow alike, is merely incidental to the main cause, and it seems to me that I have never known so supreme a satisfaction as that which comes from observing the almost infinitesimal advance which we make therein each passing month—a new evidence of initiative in one of the boys, who has come

to us, perhaps, from ten miles distant, to learn the great things in life—self-reliance, leadership, service; a new smile on some clean face which had known only grime and apathy; a new promise of regeneration—not for our own boys and girls alone, but, through them, for a whole people who are now dwelling among the shadows.

Do you remember telling me, two years ago, that we might fail in our attempt, but that it seemed to you to be the only solution of the mighty problem which exists here? Every day I become surer of the truth of your conclusion. And we shall not fail.

Virgil's vision is still leading us on, along the Road to Fulfillment. Come. . . and see if it is not so!

Affectionately your sister,

ROSE.

March third, Nineteen Twenty-one."

CHAPTER II

"THE PREACHIN' "

EASTER MORN had come and Rose was outwardly all smiles, for Philip, merry and lovable as of old, had obeyed orders and was with them again, as intimately one of the family circle as though he had never dropped out of it.

But, in spite of her happiness over having him there, and the high hopes which were hers of a still better understanding between Smiling Pass and the few who still obstinately refused to recognize it as a substitute for Beaten Creek, her heart was subject to occasional qualms. Her plan held possibilities of danger, as well as those of great gain for the Cause. If anything went wrong . . . ! But she would not permit her mind to harbor such a thought.

The worshipers began to gather very early in the morning. From miles up and down the creek and its adjacent passes they came. Those who dwelt in the immediate vicinity arrived afoot, whole families of them. The rest came on horse or mule back—whole families of them, too. They wore their Sunday clothes, which in nowise differed from their garments of everyday save for the addition of socks

muddy boots and old, soiled coats worn by the men, and hideous “store” hats or picturesque sun-bonnets by the women and girls.

Into the new House of Friendliness, muddy-footed, they trooped, and to their native shyness in the presence of strangers was today added something of awe. For the new hall was of truly magnificent proportions in their eyes, and magnificently bright from the blaze of sunlight flooding through the many windows on three of its sides—as unlike their tiny, dark dwellings as was conceivable. Pulverized sandstone and plenty of water, employed by the boys under the strict eye of the immaculate Camille, had made its floors and woodwork shining, spotless white.

The three doctors were in Donald’s study, but Rose, Margaret and Virgil began early to mingle with the ever-growing crowds and welcome each new arrival with friendly hand-clasp and spoken greeting.

Smiles’ heart sank a little when among the first to come appeared Preacher “Stammerin’ Sam.” The impediment in his speech did not apply to its vituperation. He had been especially invited—a course which had been settled upon as the lesser of two evils—; but, unless his open hostility to the work should have been disarmed by the invitation, danger indeed lay ahead. She knew the hair-trigger natures of the mountaineers; she also knew the sleeping volcanos within the breasts of her husband

and Dr. Hunter alike, and Philip's impetuosity. What would come of it if this visitor, who had been "called" to preach the truth as he saw it, without fear or favor, should feel himself impelled to use this heaven-sent opportunity to carry the battle into what he considered the enemy's camp, openly abusing his hosts to their faces and in their own home?

"Bewar' uv the wolves in sheep's clothing; bewar' uv the furriners thet cum amongst us with glib tongues, *pretendin'* tew aid, but *intendin'* fer tew destroy what we-all holds sacred, and set up false faiths in hits place." Only a fortnight previously Preacher Sam had spoken those very words to his little congregation, and she had not dared to repeat them to Donald. Now, within an hour he might say them again; and worse.

Furthermore, the woman within her rebelled. She loved her mountains and their simple people; she had a deep, a passionate pride in them, and her heart ached at the thought that they might be misjudged by her dear ones because of the manner and utterance of one who represented the worst of his kind. Inspired, after his own manner, he might indeed be—"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," and often chooses strange instruments through which to work His will. But she knew that he was narrow and illiterate, suspicious and uncleanly. He would preach after his fashion, of course. What impression would it make on Donald, on the fastidious Philip, on the refined, city-bred

Margaret, on little Camille, raised in the impressive solemnities of the Roman Catholic church, and to whom cleanliness was indeed next to godliness?

As the women and their numerous broods, together with a few of the older men, entered and took their seats, the neatly arranged chairs were moved hither and yon and all semblance of order was soon lost. The bell rang. The school children were marshaled to their places by Camille. Donald, Philip and John followed, and Virgil and Margaret joined them in their corner.

A pitifully young mother started to nurse the squalling infant whose peaked face and red eyes looked out from a soiled shawl, rebellious, as though he—with Job—would curse the day when he had been born. A gaunt, withered grandmother—Aunt Lissy’s sister, Phronie—spit liberally upon the spotless floor. Their guests had brought their squalor—their habits of a lifetime—with them. Through unshed tears, alike of shame and anger, Rose glanced about the room and the spirit of battle was re-born within her.

What if they had? She would some day carry their antitheses—sunshine and cleanliness—into *their* homes, God helping her. For they were worth working and fighting for, these pure-blooded Anglo-Saxons. And they *could* be saved, the coming generations, at least. There *was* pure gold under the unlovely soil, whatever some might contend. The remarkable facial beauty of many of the younger girls,

a fineness which dirt and the most unbecoming of clothes could not conceal, showed that. And then her eyes turned to her own little flock of school children, bright, clean, neatly dressed—the first fruits of the harvest. She smiled.

Not all were yet within-doors. Most of the men and boys lay or lounged around in the warm sun outside, and the clatter of hoofs which told of new arrivals was frequently heard.

At last, obedient to Rose's whispered request, Preacher Paul—one of the three ministers who had come for the occasion—rose from his seat in the front of the room, hymn book in hand. "We will start the service . . ." he began.

There was the sound of excited voices outside. A man appeared in the open doorway and shouted, "Cum aout uv that, all uv you."

Preacher Sam was the first to obey, and the rest, young and old, followed like sheep, crowding in haste through the doorway. Even the children of the school followed, filled with curiosity or panic over the unknown, and the men—save Donald—left their corner to discover the cause of the disturbance. Rose was too filled with concern to move from her husband's side, and the two looked at each other with questioning eyes, while the hubbub outside grew, many voices being mingled in excited demands, exclamations and unintelligible explanations.

Only a minute or two passed, however, before the tumult subsided almost as quickly as it had com-

menced, and the people began to flock back into the room with looks equally divided between amusement and chagrin.

"What on earth was the matter?" implored Rose, as her brother, John, and Virgil approached, almost bursting with laughter.

"False alarm," whispered Philip.

"But what *was* it?"

Virgil answered. "You remember the big barrel of gasoline for the lamps—the one with the red band around it, marked 'DANGER'—that we keep under the porch? Noey Scytha discovered it when he led his horse in there to hitch him. It was a new one on him and—well, you know the suspicion that we mountain folks have of anything unknown."

"Good Lord, he wasn't afraid of it?" demanded Donald.

"Scared to death; thought that it was a bomb or an infernal machine."

"Virgie, you don't mean it!" gasped Margaret.

"Sure as you're born, Margaret. When I got out there, almost every mother's son of them had a different explanation, each more absurd than the other. Some were swearing that we were Germans; others, agents for the grasping coal corporation that has been after their property, and that we had invited them here to blow them to bits so that we could steal their lands."

"And get blown up ourselves at the same time?"

"Whoever heard a mob stop to reason?" said

Rose, smiling pityingly. She knew their natures and could, in part, appreciate their fears. "What did you do?"

"Opened it up. Let 'em handle it, smell it, *taste* it. Poured a little out on the ground and set it afire. Told half a lie—said it was a kind of kerosene."

Philip was laughing and simultaneously trying to turn his laughter into an innocent spasm of coughing.

"Don't!" said Rose rather sharply. "Will I ever be able to make you realize that things like this are not laughing matters, but deadly serious? Of course this *was* funny and perhaps we can laugh when we're alone—now that it has come out all right—but for a moment I was scared dark blue. Well, let's pray that the bad beginning will mean a good ending."

Now the gathering was again complete and Preacher Paul opened the preliminary song service. Rose bravely took the initiative and soon almost the whole roomful were singing in unison of lusty male and squeaky female voices the song which Billy announced, line by line. To the uninitiated Philip, the painfully dragged melody with its everlasting portamentoes and quavers was at first torture, but in time the plaintive appeal of the hymn reached his heart and he found himself first humming, and then singing, it in his well-trained baritone. Indeed, Preacher Billy later confided to Rose that if her brother had not accustomed himself to be bound by printed notes he could learn to be a real good singer in a few months.

A long prayer by Preacher Billy followed, during which he called loudly and oft upon the Lord for aid and blessing—not for himself alone but for all the brethren, sisters and friends. And, as he prayed, he swayed his body up and down and lifted his long arms in appeal to heaven. Finally he arose from his knees and began to speak, at first in his ordinary voice but soon in rhythmic exhortation like a stentorian chant. Rose's heart warmed as she listened. He, at least, had not failed her! His message was one calling for repentance and re-birth, ere the day of judgment, the hour of whose coming no man knew, should arrive, but it was a message of universality and filled with the quickening spirit of true Christianity. When the inspiration left him and he sat down, weary and perspiring, she flashed him a little smile of appreciation and gratitude.

But the end was not yet.

"Stammerin'" Sammy, the one who had been the most virulent in his opposition to the work, was now on his feet. His heavy, unaccustomed boots clumped noisily forward until he stood in the center of the congregation, where he took off his coat, tossed it to one of the men, hitched up his suspenders, one end of which was attached by a nail to his old riding breeches, and loosened his collarless shirt front until a sizable patch of his woolen undervest was displayed. To all appearance he was going into battle!

With visible distress Rose turned to the little

group around her. "I'm horribly afraid that he is going to be pretty bad," she said in an undertone.

"Poor man, he's not to blame for being narrow and blindly bound up to the old order of things which brooks no change. If he . . . if he says anything against us . . . unpleasant, let's pretend that we haven't heard or taken it to ourselves, *please*. Innocence is our best armor. You know what is said about putting on the coat that fits."

Donald pressed her hand with a reassuring clasp, and whispered back, "We'll hold on to our chairs. Besides, it looks as though you need not worry. We're not likely to understand even if he *does* slam us. I, for one, can make out hardly a word that he is saying."

Nor was that strange. The speaker's halting syllables were so multiplied by his stammering tongue and so interrupted by frequent inarticulate sounds and the clicking together of his lean jaws, that his words were almost unintelligible. Yet Rose, who was used to his speech, was able to make out the gist of his introductory remarks.

"I haint had no eddication, friends. Two weeks in school was all I ever had. I haint a man uv larnin' and uv myself I kin do nothin'—nothin' while the Spirit is cold. And I hev a poor, stutterin' tongue, but the Lord what healed the sick and give sight to the blind kin make hit tew talk, ef He will. He hes called me, and I kin speak ef the Spirit fills me. A man must offer hisself a living sacrifice thet

God may do what He wills with him. He kin make uv him an open door, even as He said consarnin’ Hissself, ‘I am the door; ef any man go in by me he shall be saved.’ By bein’ borned again by water and the Spirit, this boy *hes* been saved and *hes* entered in at that door. You-all kin be saved in no other way whatever, my little congregation.”

Nods of agreement and murmured, “Thet air a fact,” came from different parts of the room.

“Thet air the text I wishes tew study intew—thet and the words thet comes after hit, ‘I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd layeth daown his life for the sheep. He thet is a hirelin’ and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep air not, beholdeth the wolf comin’ and leaveth the sheep and fleeth’!”

By this time the preacher’s speech had become much stronger, more comprehensible, and Donald, who had been listening with marked interest said, beneath his breath, “How on earth can he get quotations like that so straight if he can read hardly at all?”

“Hush, hush. Preachers of his kind know almost all of the Bible by heart, simply from hearing it passed down by word of mouth. It’s astonishing, I know, but it’s a fact. Donald, Philip, listen to him, now! How do you expalin *that*, if he isn’t actually inspired?”

For, even while they had been whispering together, “Stammerin’” Sammy had bent over, cupping both ears with his grimy hands, and—after standing thus

for a moment as though he were listening to some voice inaudible to them—began to speak with perfect fluency and in a tone that rang out like a bugle. He, too, was exhorting. Each sentence was commenced with an "Oh," high and loud, intoned without inflection and it ended invariably in a descending "Aaaaah!" like a long drawn out shudder.

"Psychopathic, of course. The result of intense nervous excitement. You must have seen somewhat similar manifestations of it plenty of times." Her brother answered as a physician, yet he could not wholly conceal his own rather startled interest which forced him to add, "It is a bit uncanny, though. I never heard him utter two consecutive words clearly before."

"Perhaps that is the explanation, I don't know," said Rose. "But you can't blame these people for accepting it as evidence of real inspiration, can you?"

"No."

Rose was still holding her husband's left hand and Camille had unconsciously grasped his right. The younger girl's eyes were wide and somewhat frightened. To her mind, with the training of her childhood subconsciously swaying it, a miracle had there been performed. And the man's manner and speech held her both spellbound and a little terrified, for he was now pacing back and forth and swaying up and down as he walked, as well as continually pulling his ears forward with his flat palms. His eyes were fixed and burning feverishly. And he had



begun to spit continually and with little regard to direction.

Some of his listeners sat hunched over with their heads in their hands; others had already commenced to display symptoms of religious fervor not unlike his own.

“OH, I stand between a woe and a curse, aaaah! OH, woe if I preach not the truth untew you, aaah! OH, a curse ef I preach other than thet which hes been preached and ’stablished, aaah! OH, thar is but one door and ef any tries tew enter by any other way he is a thief and a robber, aaah!”

For the greater part of an hour he continued thus to exhort the true believers and condemn all who would offer a different faith, quoting from both the Old and New Testaments with freedom and accuracy, if not always with appropriateness. To him—if he indeed thought at all—a text was a text, regardless of its context. With fearsome vividness he described the lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames awaited those not saved through re-birth by water and the Spirit and all those hireling shepherds who preached the word for pay. “OH, freely hev we received, freely do we give, aaaah! OH, we take no collections, we do not speculate upon God, aaah!” he exclaimed vehemently. Many a call of approval greeted his almost ceaseless flow of words.

He mentioned no names; it was not necessary, for at each fresh denunciation, each verbal flaying of the false shepherds whose own the sheep were not,

but who came to teach them strange doctrines, he glared anew at the little group in the corner. Their faces became whiter and their expressions more set, but Rose's plea kept them still, even when muttered sentences and dark glances came to their ears and eyes from different parts of the room. The school children twisted uneasily in their seats and kept looking around at their teachers with distressed questionings in their faces. As hard as it was for her to do it, Rose ever had an encouraging smile in answer.

"He *is* sincere, Donald, according to his lights," she murmured. "We must grin and bear it. By our works they shall know us . . . some day."

It seemed to her as though he would never, never finish. Yet the end came at length and suddenly. "OH, my maounting people, enter ye in by the narrer gate, aaah! OH, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth tew destruction, aaah! OH, and many thar be thet enter in tharby, aaah! OH, but narrer is the gate and straight is the way thet leadeth untew life."

He stopped, coughing and expectorating violently, and finished in his ordinary voice, "And few air they thet find hit. Haint I a-speakin' the truth, brethren?" Preacher Sammy's jaws clicked together convulsively, the muscles of his skinny throat worked and he sat down, wiping his perspiring face and stammering out some remark to his nearest neighbor.

Rose was instantly on her feet. It was over and

it might have been infinitely worse. With a nod of agreement, and with a fixed smile upon her lips she moved to Preacher Paul's side and softly begged him to sing again. He complied at once, starting another appealing mountain hymn which commenced, "I'm alone in this world, I am weary of life, in this unfriendly world I'm alone."

As the woman joined her clear, sweet voice to his untuneful one on the second line, it seemed to her that he had chosen it with particular appropriateness. Truly her present world seemed unfriendly enough and she was almost alone in it. But not quite. A few staunch friends, and Donald—her rock of Gibraltar—were in yonder corner, and the children loved her, if many of their parents did not. "I'm alone in this world, I am wearied of life. Take me home, kind Savior, take me home."

The second stanza was begun and with it came an interrupting commotion. Aunt Phronie had climbed onto the seat of her chair and now—with her corded arms stretched straight above her head—she was crying loudly, "Cum fill me! Cum fill me! Cum fill me!"

Philip and John both started from their places as she swayed perilously, and seemed on the point of having a convulsion, but Rose waved them back. The rest continued to sing, paying no attention to the old woman's raving, although two of her compeers moved quietly to her side and lent their steady support as she began to jump frantically up and

down, clapping her hands together and shouting, "I air filled with the Holy Spirit. Oh, brothers and sisters I air filled. Cum, take my hand—the strangers, too."

Before the steadying arms could restrain her, she had started forward, striding from chair seat to chair seat, and grasping the outstretched hands of all who were within reach. The three preachers were also shaking hands with all those in their vicinity and Paul, singing lustily as he walked, approached Donald and the rest, to give them the brotherly greeting.

Rose smiled happily. It was almost over and all had gone at least reasonably well.

CHAPTER III

DONALD'S INSPIRATION AND WHAT CAME OF IT

"AND now if every mind is clear and satisfied . . ." Preacher Paul was beginning the benediction and Rose sighed with relief. All was well.

" . . . And may the blessing of God go with each and every one of you is my prayer, Amen." he concluded.

There was a scraping of chairs and shuffling of feet as the congregation prepared to depart, suddenly interrupted by the sound of Donald's cane tapping on the floor for attention. Rose turned in surprise, which quickly changed into troubled anticipation as she heard her usually taciturn husband begin to speak. What could it mean?

"One moment, friends, if you please," he was saying. "I want to thank you all for coming here to this service—may we have many like it."

"Oh, the old hypocrite!" whispered Philip in Margaret's ear.

But there was an eager light in Donald's face which plainly showed that he was not speaking formal platitudes, as he went on.

"It is good for all of us to get together like this, for it helps our mutual understanding. We want

you to come during the week, too, and learn that we are with you in spirit all the time. And we want to feel that you are with us, as well, because—as most of you must realize, now—the work here is wholly for you. It's more than that; it's *yours*. My wife has not raised this little school and hospital in Smiling Pass for our sakes, but for yours—she was bred among you in these mountains and is one of you at heart. I guess you know it. Besides, your own folks—Judd, Virgil and others—are already almost running it; Miss Treville and the rest of us are just doing our bit to help in training your own boys and girls so that they can carry it on alone, some day. But it's really yours now; and some of your children are now reaping the benefits. Isn't it so?"

He paused and waited eagerly for a response. It came in the form of a few mumbled, "I reckon hit air," from one or two quarters.

"Of course it is! We love them and are proud of them all. The way most of them take hold of this new work shows what mountain people can do, if they're given a chance. Everyone, no matter where he lives, wants at heart to better his condition, and of course you do. Smiling Pass is here to help you do it—and it is yours. But the idea has just come to me that you might feel that fact more strongly if each and every one of you had a real share in it—if you should actually become joint owners of it.

"We're getting generous help from thousands of

friends outside the mountains all over the rest of the United States, and we must continue to seek it, of course. But won't you help, too?"

Rose gave a little gasp and started towards him, a startled expression on her face and her hand lifted in mute warning. But she was too late.

The man whose utterances were normally so brief had become fired with an idea which, he felt, might solve their greatest difficulty—the continued suspicion and masked hostility with which they were still regarded by many with whom they had not yet established real contact. It seemed to him that the opportunity had come to establish a personal touch with this people whom Smiles loved, and his plain, strong face was alight with the thought of helping in a more intimate manner than he had yet been able to do. In his enthusiasm for the Cause he failed to see and heed her gesture.

"For *your* work, then—which is really a sacred work, a service for God—cannot we, here and now, take up a collection in which everyone shall join, giving much or little according to his means? Won't you do it?"

Donald stopped, flushed with sudden embarrassment, and, for the first time, realized that something was wrong. His wife's white face and frightened expression bespoke the fact, as did the deep silence in the room—a silence pregnant with something which he could not understand. It was the first service he had attended; he knew next to nothing about the tenets of their faith.

"He wants fer tew take up a *collection*! Hit's fer *thet* they asked we-all up hyar. I knowed thar was somethin' like *thet*, whatever."

Someone only a little distance from him was addressing another and making no effort to lower his voice or dissemble the scorn and anger in it. With some grimly silent, others hostilely voluble, the gathering surged out of the hall. Even Rose could not for the moment find words with which to address them in explanation, as they passed her by with sullen looks and averted faces. There was fear in her heart. For less, she knew, religious meetings in those mountains had broken up in riots: rifles had been fired, men had been killed! What would the next moment bring forth?

The voices outside began to recede, mingled with the clatter of horses' hoofs. Rose drew a freer breath and then turned to the still silent group in the corner. Her first words were almost a wail.

"Oh, Donald! Why *did* you say that? I know, of course. You thought that you were doing something helpful, and it was dear of you, but"

"But I've apparently put my foot in it—good and plenty. Hanged if I understand why, though." Bewilderment and anger were alike distinguishable in her husband's words.

"Put your foot in hit is right," answered Judd.

"No one's blaming you, Donald," Virgil added, hastily. "But . . . well, the word '*collection*' at a service here is like a flock of red rags to a yardful

of bulls. Didn't you get what 'Stammerin' Sammy said?"

"Yes, Donald. He practically accused us of being 'hireling shepherds' as it was, you know. *They* don't accept a penny for their ministry—I really think that we should honor them for that—and . . .” Rose began, only to be interrupted by Margaret's heated exclamation, "But the Bible says that a laborer is worthy of his hire. Ministers . . .”

"Oh, don't let's discuss ethics now." Smiles spoke sharply, for her. "The point is that the idea is abhorrent to them."

"But I wasn't asking for contributions to pay their d— their preachers," Donald retorted. "I should think that any fool would have understood that my suggestion hadn't anything whatever to do with religion."

"Of course it hadn't, but you know how super-sensitive, how quick to cast suspicion on outsiders, they are, and the word 'collection' has only one significance in their minds, you see. I suppose that they have got the idea that we are really nothing but missionaries, under a new name. That is almost the only kind of people who have ever come in here from the outside world, trying to help them, and the trouble is that the missionaries have almost universally followed just the wrong method. They've tried to convert them, against their wills, and practically demanded money from them for doing it. Oh, the different Churches, with the best intentions in the

world, have blundered woefully, time and again, simply because they have acted with blind impetuosity and made no real effort to understand and appreciate the mountaineers' peculiar viewpoint. And now we are suffering for their mistakes."

"That's absurd. We're not missionaries, and what are we getting out of it, except hard work, I should like to know? We're giving, giving, giving—I know that *you're* pretty nearly killing yourself—and asking nothing for ourselves," said Donald, hotly.

"Of course. But they can't, or won't see it—yet. I haven't a doubt but that many of them are convinced that we are pocketing the bigger part of all the money that is contributed by outsiders. You know that there are others who should know better, but who have practically accused us of doing that. And as a man thinks so is he—and so *does* he. Don, we mustn't blame them for it. They don't grasp new ideas, particularly altruistic ideas, quickly. How could they, living here shut in physically and mentally, and trained as they have been for generations? We started under a cloud, raised by others, whose intentions were wonderful, but whose methods were worse than useless, and now"

"Now we had better strengthen our first line of defenses again," remarked Virgil, practically. "I'll put 'Bad Bill' back on guard, tonight."

"Good heavens, is it as bad as that?" demanded Donald.

"Hit certainly is—anything's likely to happen," Judd answered, pessimistically.

"And probably nothing *will* happen," Rose retorted. "However, I believe in safety first, and Billy"

"Why send for him? I'm game to stand watch tonight. It would be a bit of a lark."

Philip laughed boyishly as he spoke, but both Margaret and Camille broke in with distressed opposition to his plan, whereupon John said, "Isn't it nice to be so popular! No, Phil, you're out. The ladies couldn't spare you, and *we* can't spare any pigs or the cows—one of which you would probably shoot if they took to rambling about in the dark. I'll do it; I won't be missed if one of our delightful neighbors should elect to take a pot shot at me."

"You should, as punishment for that mean remark, John Hunter," answered Rose. "Just the same, I shan't permit it. You're too valuable and we can't afford to risk our assets needlessly."

"Thanks."

An unusually good dinner whose *pièce de résistance* was chickens—shot, after the custom of the country, by Judd and Malvary, and deliciously fried by the girls in the Domestic Science course under the capable direction of Mrs. Gayheart—lent a brighter aspect to the day. And almost everybody forgot the cloud which had swiftly gathered at noon-tide in the bright sunshine of victory, when the Smiling Pass nine met and soundly trounced the rest of Beaten Creek in the afternoon, despite the fact that

its rivals were older and bigger. Virgil had learned baseball in the army, and, in teaching it to his charges, had instilled a spirit of team play which was not to be vanquished.

Philip—"Uncle Phil" he had already become to all the younger ones, following Billy Boy's leadership in applying the title—acted as umpire, and there was a sufficiently large gathering of spectators to indicate that most of the immediate neighbors, at least, bore no grudge as a result of Donald's ill advised suggestion. Don himself was not among them, however, for a nervous reaction had produced a sharp return of his trouble, already aggravated by the rainy season, and his pillowed chair claimed him again. Rose, too, stayed but a little while, departing home during the second inning with Smiles, junior, who seemed feverish and surprisingly fretful for *her* sunny little self. With them went John, carrying the latter on his broad shoulder, and Camille, who still considered the baby her special charge.

With the ringing of the first bell for supper the game ended, and Philip joined Margaret upon one of the rude benches for spectators, set beneath a magnolia bush beside the diamond, which slanted down from the mountainfoot, on whose ninety degree slope the right fielder stood, to the creek, whose waters captured most of the flies knocked to deep left.

"So this is Easter!" he exclaimed, laughing and fanning his flushed face with his cap. "Well, I feel

as though I had performed more of a religious act in refereeing that fight than I did in attending service this morning. I hadn't thought of it before, but the particular day in the Church calendar wasn't so much as alluded to then, was it?"

"No," smiled the girl, motioning him to a seat by her side. "Perhaps they didn't even know it, although, on Christmas, Preacher Paul—he tries to come up almost every Sunday and assist us with our little Bible class—talked wholly about the birth of *John*. I really believe that *he* is a greater figure in their faith than Christ Himself, and of course they take the title literally and insist that John was a member of the Baptist church, for wasn't he 'John the Baptist?' Their sincerity is touching—and a little pathetic, isn't it?"

"Yes. But the idea of their taking umbrage at Don's suggestion, the way they did—unless it was because it 'touched' their pocket-books."

"Oh, it wasn't that in the least; Rose's explanation was right. They have only a little money, of course, but they are as generous with it as with everything else they own. 'All for one and one for all' is the mountain, as well as the Musketeers' motto. If anyone here wants anything, about all he has to do is to ask for, or merely take it."

"Steal it, you mean?"

"No, no. Once we did lose a lot of piping for the new well; Judd had left it lying out for days, as usual, and probably someone needed it for the worm

in a moonshine still—but they almost never steal anything, unless it is locked up; a lock seems to hold a visible challenge. Of course they may *borrow* anything they see and happen to need, without asking for it . . .”

“And forget to return it,” added Philip, his eyes twinkling.

“Exactly.” Margaret was perfectly serious until she saw the man’s amused smile. Then they both laughed, and he exclaimed, “I never in my life knew a woman to change as completely as you have since you came down here, Peggy.”

She colored swiftly and lowered her eyes.

“I haven’t had the courage to compliment you upon it before, but I do now. You’ve certainly done wonders for those kids . . .”

“Oh, no. But they have done wonders for me, Philip,” she interrupted. “They’ve taught me more than I can ever hope to teach them in repayment.”

“What? If you can put it in words,” he asked bluntly.

“I don’t guess that I can—oh, yes, I say ‘guess’ now; we all do. But perhaps it’s the meaning of life, and how much more worthwhile the real things are than the superfluities, even when they are simple and most primitive. I’ve learned to love the mountaineers, young and old, just as Smiles loves them, Phil. But oh, what a silly, conceited little fool I was two years ago! I don’t blame you for having said what you did about me to Rose and Donald.”

It was the man's turn to flush. "I was a cad to do it . . . and it was a bit unkind of them to tell you, as well."

"But they didn't. I . . . I just guessed it. The coat fitted, so I put it on. Well, let's forget the past. It is ended and I don't want to talk about it."

"Right. What shall we discuss—the future? Are we going to be raided again tonight, the way we were the first time I was here?"

"Oh, I hope not. Everything has been going so well ever since Christmas. How I wish that you might have been here then and seen our wonderful tree, Phil; the first that the people here had ever beheld in their lives. We had it in the dining-room which the little boys had decorated beautifully with evergreens and . . . and mistletoe . . ."

Margaret's hesitation was almost imperceptible, but the man noted it and felt a hot twinge of jealousy, which he characterized to himself as utterly absurd. Supposing someone—Virgil perhaps—*had* kissed her, what was it to him?

Evening shadows had begun to creep across the valley, but the sunset glow still lingered in the western sky and tinted Margaret's face with its warm light. He glanced quickly at her, and suddenly realized how infinitely more lovely she was than she had been two years ago, now that her glorious hair was simply dressed in a manner which disclosed instead of concealing her broad, smooth forehead and shapely ears, and her face was free of any arti-

ficial beautifying and her blue eyes filled with the lights and shadows of real purposefulness. Perhaps it was merely the call of spring and the calm even-tide, but he suddenly found that his mind was harboring the equally absurd thought that he, too, wanted to kiss her!

Yet, all the while that these fleeting ideas were passing through his brain, he was listening to her continued description, for she had hurried on, “. . . and red and green crinkly paper festoons which I—which we had sent to Boston for. The tree was a *giant*, Phil; the biggest and smelliest you ever knew and all a-shimmer with make-believe silver snow and . . . oh, everything that we have at home, besides presents for everyone.

“And everyone came, just as they did this morning, grown-ups and little ones; some of them smiling and eager, and some merely listlessly curious—at first. A lot of the men were still half-drunk from the night before’s celebration, and one allowed that ‘ef he tuk a notion he could go in thar and smash thet thar big Christmas tree UP.’ But he didn’t! Bill Cress was on deck and he simply caught him by the arm—you can guess how—and drawled, ‘Maybe thet *is* so, Bud. But hit jest happens thet *thet* thar Christmas tree haint a-going tew be smashed up. I reckon thet me and you hed better be hevin’ a stroll.’

“Well, they strolled, and when they strolled back, Bud remarked positively, ‘Hit’s a sight tew find

about haow mean a decent sort uv feller like me kin be when he's full uv lick. All I hev tew say is this—ef airy one uv you onery cusses hez made any plans agin thet thar Christmas tree, you-all hev *me* to reckon with. Let's go in'."

Philip laughed heartily, alike at the story and her mimicry, for Margaret was a natural actress, and she continued, "After that declaration everything went wonderfully and it has ever since. But now . . . oh, I don't know. Of course we have made open enemies. We have had to send a few boys away for . . . for different reasons—one or two things which have happened have hurt us, and then there still remains a little lawless element which is always ready and eager to take a hand in any mischief. Let's hope that nothing will happen, and if anything *should*, please promise not to mix up in it, Phil."

He laughed again. "Good gracious, don't you want me to have any fun?"

"*Please*, Philip," she begged earnestly, laying her hand appealingly upon his arm.

The touch delighted him, but he replied, "No, I won't promise. Come, Peggy, it must be almost supper time and I want to see if Junior has anything more than a tummy-ache from eating too much Easter chicken."

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAGIC NIGHT

THE better freedom *under* the law, rather than freedom from law, was the rule at Smiling Pass. Many regulations there had to be, and these strictly lived up to, but Sunday was half Holy day and half holiday. Many of the pupils went home to spend it with their families, and during the evening a marked informality marked the activities of those who remained, so long as no cardinal rules were broken. The supper was a buffet affair and attendance there-at irregular.

On this Easter evening the usual procedure suffered a still further interruption. Smiles, junior—their universally adored baby—was really ill, for the first time in her life, and the news cast a spell of gloom over young and old alike. Billy Boy could scarcely be driven away from the House of Happiness, and of course Camille, Margaret and Philip remained with the anxious mother and father. Donald's own recurrent agony robbed him of his professional calmness, and he was only too glad to let Philip take full charge. Both he and Rose concurred in the other's immediate diagnosis that the baby was suffering from a severe, but probably temporary,

attack of ptomaine poisoning; but it was *their* baby who was ill and, although they might assent mentally, their hearts were filled with parental qualms.

With the sounding of the evening bell, the children, including the openly rebellious Billy, were sent to their rooms, but Camille lingered, although it was her custom to go to the girls' quarters and see that all "her children" were safely in and studying. To-night, however, she could not, even for a moment, tear herself from the little one who had been almost as much her's as its mother's from the moment of its birth, and who now tossed, feverish and fretful, in the little crib, with deep red spots on both flushed cheeks, and tousled ringlets of spun gold clinging to its damp little forehead.

A constrained silence bound the little group in the darkened room, for, in addition to the present anxiety, there lay in the back of each one's mind uncertain and painful anticipations. What had the darkness in store for them from that still hostile, tradition-bound few who seldom let slip an opportunity to molest them, and for whom a rare excuse for mischief-making had most unfortunately been provided? Even then Virgil was placing the devoted Bill Cress in the shadows of the sawmill's shelter roof, with rifle close beside him, and they knew that it was no mere formal precaution.

With his last duty for the night done, Virgil quietly joined the others in the office living-room, whither Junior's crib had been moved, and his coming some-

how affected them adversely, for he was plainly nervous. He worshiped the baby, as she did him, and any set-back to the Cause in which his life was bound up was worse than a blow to him. Moreover, he had not been quite his usual buoyant self from the evening of Philip's arrival, although to the new-comer he was as friendly as ever. A strange moodiness seemed to have taken possession of him, dating from the moment that the delighted Camille had impulsively, yet with shyness, run into "Uncle Philip's" outstretched arms, and he had on more than one occasion been heard to speak sharply to some of the boys and even to his beloved sister, Omie, who had in turn been more than ordinarily restive. Camille he had scarcely addressed at all, and she was both hurt and disturbed by his behavior, for no cloud had dimmed or chilled the warmth of their friendship in all the twenty months which had passed since that afternoon on the mountaintop.

The bedtime hour of nine came at last and Rose insisted that the girl go to her room. She rebelled, almost tearfully, until Virgil—touched by the sight of her obvious unhappiness, and repentant—said, "Come, sister. We are really only in the way. Junie is going to be all right by morning, and bed is the place for both of us. I'll go as far as the dormitory with you."

They had at length departed together, but not until Rose had promised to send for the girl if she

should be needed. A moment later she herself went out to the driven well to procure a fresh supply of cold water with which to bathe the baby's burning forehead—refusing Philip's offer to get it for her, on the ground that she could find it more easily in the dark than could he.

As she stepped into the blackness of the night, she almost ran against John, who was on the veranda finishing his evening pipeful of tobacco. When she told him of her purpose, he took the pitcher from her and would have gone alone to the pump if she had not fallen in step with him, laying her hand upon his arm with a little mute appeal for physical guidance and for sympathy. The contact sent a thrill to his heart and set his tensed muscles to trembling, but the woman was not consciously aware of it; her every thought was centered upon her baby.

They reached the well, a few paces further up the hillside, and with a few powerful strokes of the pump handle John filled the big pitcher to the brim with the clear, cold water. Then he turned and glanced at Rose.

She was standing, motionless, facing the eastern mountain, over the wooded summit of which the rim of the full moon was just appearing, a segment of gleaming silver. Its cool light began to overflow into the valley, magically dispelling the dark night shadows, and momentarily making every familiar object more clearly discernible, yet unreal. The misty radiance enveloped the woman, in her simple

white dress, and imparted to her lovely face an ethereal quality, to which the shadow of pain reflected in her wonderful eyes gave an added appeal.

The man caught his breath sharply, and he reached out his hands to her. The irresistible call of the moment, the loveliness of the woman whom he had long worshiped in silence, and who now stood so close to him—and suffering,—caused his heart to leap and break the final bond of restraint which had held it in check during almost two years of craving, that had grown more insistent with each succeeding day.

John had fluxed his iron will, turned it into steel in the fires of love, and built of it a wall to contain the flames of his burning, hopeless passion; but now they leaped with such fierce intensity that it became molten again. His soul was seared, but the agony of knowing that his effort was futilely ended only added to his love and longing. The anguish of the moment started beads of sweat upon his forehead, and was evidenced in every feature.

Still unconscious of the change which had swept over the man beside her, Rose continued to gaze at the slowly rising glory of the night. It was so majestic, so calm, that it could not help but restore a moiety of peace to her heart. God *was* in His heaven; of course her darling's illness was but a passing thing—if she were then nursing a baby other than her own she would not be unduly disturbed, even

though every infant was precious to her. She smiled; at least the faint suggestion of a smile touched her lips, newborn courage and a trace of lingering pain both having a share in it.

John saw it, and its very sweetness was like a knife-thrust to him.

"God," he whispered, hoarsely. "Don't look like that! I can't bear it, Rose."

She turned quickly to him. She instinctively reached out her hand, in a movement alike of appeal and wondering protest, and he seized it in a grasp so passionate that a little cry of pain was wrung from her lips.

"John! Don't speak—don't look that way!" she exclaimed.

"I can't help it. To see you, so beautiful . . . and suffering . . . I can't stand it. If I could, I'd give my life to save you a moment's pain. Oh, how I love you, heart of my heart!"

"Are you *mad*, John?"

Her tone held rather frightened distress than anger, and she freed her hand and placed it against his breast in an action which was still more appealing and protesting.

Her touch, light as it was, served as an electric spark to set in action his dynamic nature. He swept her into his arms and held her almost brutally tight, the while whispering words of passionate love in her ears as she pressed her face close against his breast in order to avoid his questing lips. She was, for an instant, too surprised and shocked to resist.

Within the House of Happiness Donald had limped painfully to a chair by the open window, and he saw it all. The vague light of the half-risen moon illuminated the patch of mountainside before him as though it had been a scene on the stage, and he felt as detached as though he were indeed a gallery spectator at the play, separated from its action by the pit; or perhaps rather like a man enduring a swift nightmare in which he *must* move in order to save a loved one, and yet finds himself bound, unable to lift so much as a finger.

Just behind him, in the darkness and with her back fortunately toward the window, sat Margaret, bending over the crib and whispering soft love-words to the fretful baby, who was continually calling, "Muvver, muvver." Even the relief that an audible cry might have afforded him was denied the man, and the physical agony which his first violent start had produced had left him prostrate and weak. The moment held all the torture of an eternity in hell. Rose—his wife—was in another's arms! He had seen her turn to that other and place her hand upon his breast, appealingly. John Hunter loved her, even as he did. And she?

"Muvver. I want my muvver."

His baby's voice brought a new stab to his heart. The thought, "Could he have lost the greatest thing in the world, Smiles' love?" crushed his soul. Impossible! Reason and desire alike refused to sanction it. Yet *was* it impossible? How many times had he

bitterly told himself that he, an almost helpless cripple, was no true mate for her, in her abounding youth, and there came the further appalling realization of how otherwise unworthy—how embittered and cynical he had become during the past two years. And there was the final evidence of his own eyes!

There came the sound of a startled exclamation just behind him. Virgil had returned, and tiptoed into the room. He, too, was looking out of the window, and had seen. Donald closed his eyes, while the finger nails of his clinched hands bit deep into the flesh. He opened them again. Virgil was gone; now he could hear his rapid footsteps outside on the porch.

Two others heard them as, well. Rose had already twisted free of John's embrace and stepped back, swaying with sudden faintness, but neither had moved from the spot, nor did they until Virgil, hastening up the hillside, reached them. He stopped, and for another instant the full white radiance of the moon shone upon the tense, statue-like group. Then a veil of cloud-rift drifted over the shining orb, partially dimming its light. With a sound like a choking gasp John wheeled about and strode down the hill towards the creek.

"I'll carry the pitcher back for you, Rose," said Virgil, quietly. She seized his hand, and catching her breath with a dry sob, whispered, "Poor John . . . poor John." And then, "Don't tell Donald."

The youth started, but succeeded in checking the

words which he was on the point of uttering, and, with her hand still clinging tightly to his, he led her slowly back to the house.

Donald had resumed his former chair, and in the darkness Rose could not see the look of speechless agony upon his drawn face, which had aged years in that single moment. Without speaking to him, she dropped on her knees by the side of the crib and, taking the moist handkerchief from Margaret, dipped it in the fresh water, murmuring softly, "Here, mother's baby. This will feel good on your hot little forehead."

No one else spoke, and for a few moments, only her continued soothing endearments broke the utter silence.

Then it was further disturbed by the voice of Camille, speaking in low but troubled tones from the doorway, "Virgil, do you know where Omie is? The other girls at the dormitory say she hasn't come in this evening, and your mother hasn't seen her."

Those in the room could not see the speaker, although they all instinctively turned towards the door. And each sensed, rather than saw, the other start.

"No," he answered, stepping towards her. "I haven't seen her since before the ball game. Why, where could . . ." he stopped.

"She . . . she went up the mountain this afternoon, Veda says." Camille's words came hesitatingly.

"Did anyone . . . was she alone?"

"Make them stop talking, muvver, *please*. I can't go bye-bye," the baby broke in, with a little wail, and Rose responded tenderly, "Yes, yes, darling. They'll go out in the hall. You go too, Philip," she commanded quietly, but with a heavy though unnamed fear settling upon her heart.

"No," came back to her in Camille's retreating voice. "At least Veda says that she also saw . . ."

"Not Mally!" Virgil's exclamation sounded as though uttered from between clinched teeth.

"Yes."

An hour had fled by, and now the mountainside bore many tiny yellow lights, zigzagging slowly upward through the forest. Veda Thornsberry had reiterated her statement, saying that Omie had slipped away from the other girls as soon as the dinner dishes had been washed, and she had, by mere chance, seen her disappear a few minutes later among the trees, part way up the mountain. She had been alone, but Malvary, carrying his gun as though starting out to hunt, had taken the same trail almost immediately. The youth's continued absence had been confirmed by a visit first to the boy's house and then to the Amos home, where his father and Judd had learned of his disappearance with equal surprise and anger.

And now the older of the Boy Scouts and several of the hastily summoned men of the neighborhood,

led by Virgil, whose face in the moonlight was stern and white, were moving in a wide-strung line up the mountain side with flickering lanterns, seeking, yet half fearing to find.

It was the youth himself who, another hour later—unconscious of the scratches dealt to his hands and face—pushed his way through a thicket which grew close to the base of the cliff, crowned by the overhanging flat rock, and discovered the pitifully huddled, still white form, lying like a crushed spring flower upon a bed of moss and beaten-down ferns. With a dry sob shaking his weary body, he knelt beside her and gathered her in his strong young arms. Then his heart stopped, and leaped again with a surge of joy, for she had moaned a little and her scarcely moving lips had seemed to form his name.

With a wordless prayer of thanksgiving in his soul, Virgil lifted his burning eyes to the starry heavens, and saw—directly above him and full fifty feet in the air—the edge of the great rock upon which he had once stood so carelessly, declaring that there was no danger. A small tree, with one branch broken and hanging like the wing of a wounded bird, grew out almost at right angles from a deep seam, half way down the cliff. Suddenly he knew. She had fallen from that rock. God in Heaven, why had she not been killed? Then came another thought. If she had fallen, might it not have been an accident, after all, and Malvary not there at all? With his whole soul he prayed that it had been so.

Then he stood erect, with his little sister still in his arms, and cried aloud, "I've found her! She's here. Quick, bring your lanterns!"

The other searchers came running and crashing through the bushes until they had all gathered about the pair, the mountain men silent and grim, as was their wont, for such tragedies were ever in the background of their lives; the boys silent from fright and curiosity combined. All of them offered to help him carry his burden down the mountain, but he refused. She was his, and he could not part with her again, even for a moment. And so he bore her down the unpathed hillside, as gently as possible, yet with his heart crying out for the happily unconscious girl who moaned with every fresh jolt and jar, although she could not have known that she suffered.

Almost a third hour later the slow-moving group emerged from the forest's fringe into the clearing, and the moonlit roofs of Smiling Pass appeared just below them; and stopped there, abruptly. For to their ears came the vicious crack of a rifle, followed by a cry of human pain, and their eyes caught sight of three figures fleeing, and then of red and yellow tongues of flame leaping up at one corner of the sawmill shed. From somewhere, surely not in Beaten Creek *this* night, when everybody knew that tragedy was on foot at the Center, had come a few rioters, primed with corn whisky and bent on mischief, which was perhaps not wholly vicious in its inception, but rather a sport too fascinating to be passed

up when such a rare occasion had been made for participation in it. One of them had tolled the guard away from the tempting sawmill, by tearing down a distant section of the paling fence, while the other two set fire to a ready-made pile of chips and shavings beside the boiler. Bill Cress, chafing at his enforced inaction, had seen the fleeing figures and shot to kill, although he merely wounded, as they were to learn later.

"Run, boys!" commanded Virgil, his voice thick with rage at this final injury. "Ring the alarm, and form the fire bucket line from the creek."

They obeyed on the instant, thrilling with the new excitement, and, aided by the equally incensed men, Virgil himself almost ran the rest of the way to the door of the House of Happiness, where Rose, Margaret and Camille were waiting, pale and frightened. The baby was at last restlessly asleep.

But there was no sleep for the other dwellers in the house that night.

Donald sat in the vaguely lighted room by the side of his feverish baby daughter, and his thoughts were grotesquely distorted, his fears magnified, like his own shadow cast by the moonlight upon the further wall. His child was seriously ill; if she should die what had he left? With that thought would begin again the oft-fought battle between faith and reason, on the one hand, and suspicion and jealousy on the other. To have even so much

as misgiving regarding Rose's loyalty—no matter how much provocation she might have had to turn to another for love and consolation—was unthinkable. Yet the next moment he was doing it, and consequently flaying his own soul for so doing.

Margaret—full of sympathy, but unsuspecting the true cause of the misery apparent in his face every time that the lamp was lighted—remained with him.

Rose and Philip spent the dragging hours between the crib of the sick and fretful child and the hospital cot which held the moaning girl, now in a state of coma, now weakly delirious. Beside her, sat her mother—motionless, speechless, with the latest of many sorrows evidenced only by the agonized look in her tired eyes—with Camille beside her, holding, and sometimes gently stroking, her gnarled hand. Outside, on the veranda between the two buildings, Virgil paced incessantly, and the sound of his heavy footsteps reminded Rose of that other night, years before, when she had sat—alone that time—by the side of the equally desperately ill Lou Amos, while *her* brother walked, back and forth, like that, upon the squeaking snow outside the cabin door. As then, she now wanted to run out and order the man to cease, before she went mad.

Soon after five o'clock in the morning the first pale opalescent streaks preceding the true dawn appeared above the eastern mountain, and simultaneously Camille came out from the hospital doorway and laid her hand in that of the tortured youth.

"Is she . . . is Omie . . .?" A sudden choking sensation in his throat prevented him from completing the question.

"She is better, I think, Virgie. Your mother and Rose, they are talking with her, for she is no longer delirious."

"Thank God!" Suddenly he noticed how weary she looked, and added, "You'd better go to bed, child. You've been up all night."

"And you, too. I . . . I am going now."

She swayed slightly, and caught hold of the railing, but refused his offer to accompany her as far as the dormitory. When she had departed, slowly, the man turned and stood, immovable, gazing at the closed door of the hospital. What was Omie, his little sister, telling to the two women within that forbidding portal? A sudden wave of weakness swept over him, as he saw the door open again and Smiles step forth from it. He wanted to go forward to meet her, but could not. How pale and wan, she, too, looked in the cold light of the early morning! Virgil tried to speak, but failed even in that.

"Come with me."

Rose spoke softly, as she turned in the other direction from the House of Happiness. The lettered sign over its door caught his eye, by chance, and he felt that her act was full of ill-omen. With an effort, he followed and fell in step with her as she walked down the bridge-like piazza toward the dining hall. For a moment neither spoke.

Then Rose gave a weary sigh and said, "I don't know, dear boy. She is sleeping now—we've given her a harmless narcotic—but she is fearfully bruised and wrenched. I don't think that a single bone was broken, but she has a bad concussion—God alone knows why she wasn't killed outright by that terrible fall!"

Virgil grew cold all over, and his legs felt oddly weak and detached. He attempted to speak at least thrice before he succeeded in uttering the words, "Did he . . . did Malvary . . .?"

"No, dear."

Once again his heart grew warm with relief, and there was new life in his voice as he cried, "Then he wasn't there, after all? Oh, thank God."

For an instant Rose did not answer. Then she said sadly, "Yes, Virgil, he was there. You have made a great mistake—we all have. We share in the blame for this tragedy. They loved each other . . ."

He clinched his fists and would have hotly interrupted; but she checked him by hastily continuing, "We might have ended their infatuation in a different way than this, if we had fully understood, and you had not been so bitterly hostile to him, always, and so dictatorial in the way in which you have forbidden Omie so much as to talk to him. It resulted as it always does, Virgil. Blind opposition invariably fans the flame of youthful passion. We should have known that it would . . . I should have known it."

"What . . . what happened . . . up there?" he demanded, ignoring her words.

"Mally followed her—I suppose that it was all pre-arranged, a tryst. He begged her to run away and marry him at once—they're still children in our eyes, but, from the mountain standards, quite old enough to marry. I think that she must have refused to leave us—to leave *you*—yet . . . It was hard to get the story clearly, she was so weak and only half lucid. Poor child, she sobbed so!" Rose paused, then hurried on to stop his outburst. "She loved him and told him so; and he loved her—truly, I have no doubt, as well as with all the passion of his untamed mountain nature. Oh, he came to us too late to change! We must remember his own tragic boyhood, Virgil. As terrible as what happened is, I can't find it in my heart to blame him too greatly."

"Did she . . . did she jump?"

"No, at least I do not think so. His love overcame his self-restraint just as . . . as John's . . ."

"I know."

"She was frightened . . . and fled, blindly. Oh, the poor child."

"And he . . . he saw her fall . . . and ran away." Virgil's words fell now like the cutting lash of a steel flail.

"Don't. He must have thought that she was . . . was killed. Of course he was terror-stricken."

"I'm going to find, *and kill him!*"

CHAPTER V

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

"YES, I'm going to kill him!"

Rose cried out in terror, as much at the sound of Virgil's voice, which was utterly changed—so thick and hoarse as to be almost inarticulate—as at the words themselves. Others, too, had heard the threat and shared her fear.

Playwright and author have free rein over their puppet characters, and can bring them into scene or story at the psychological moment in subservience to their wills. But Fate is ever the greatest of all dramatists, and men, her playthings, obey her behests just as inexorably. In the intensity of their talk neither Virgil nor Rose had marked the approach, from different directions, of several others who dwelt at Smiling Pass.

First there was Humpty Hite, toiling up the hillside on the initial of many trips with coal to the kitchen. He stopped, and stood—bowed and pitiable—with curious amazement in his weak blue eyes. Then there was the youth's mother, worn and weary from her long vigil by the bedside of her stricken daughter, yet still obedient to the call of duty. The hunger of the multitude must needs be satisfied,

even if *her* whole world was in chaos. And with her came Camille, her countenance temporarily refreshed by an application of stinging, icy water. Tired as she was, sleep had been out of the question, and she had suddenly remembered that Mrs. Gayheart would need help in preparing the breakfast. This morning Omie could not aid her.

Last, there was Judd, slowly mounting the steps. He had not slept that night, either, for he knew that his nephew was still missing and inferentially charged with a deadly sin. Now he was coming, slowly, to learn the worst.

The sight of Malvary's uncle—the man who was responsible for the lad's coming to Smiling Pass, who had pledged himself for his good behavior and always taken his part, almost acrimoniously, when friction had arisen—unloosed the full power of Virgil's grief and rage. In excoriating words he recounted the story of Omie's tragedy and—for the moment utterly forgetful of the fact that he was in the presence of women—spoke in the language of wrathful men, without consideration.

Judd did not respond, verbally; but the look upon his face told the story of his distress. Heavy at heart, he turned and with bowed head slowly descended the steps. The others paid no attention to his going, for Camille—who had now heard the full story for the first time—was weeping bitterly and crying out, with all the pent-up passion of a nature in which abhorrence of lascivious men had become ingrained, "*Oh, le bête; le Bochel Qu'il faut mourir!*"

"No, no, Camille! Don't speak like that; you don't understand. You're a child, and don't understand the power of temptation," Rose protested, drawing the girl, now trembling with grief and passion, into her arms.

But Camille shook her head in violent denial, and answered, "I do. I do, Rose. But it is not an excuse for . . . *that*. Were not Virgil and ' thus on that very rock, once, and he" She abruptly checked herself, even in the midst of the onward sweep of her excitement, and the woman, suddenly understanding, held her closer.

Virgil's mother had clasped him to her thin breast. Her toil-worn hands were clutching him desperately and her seamed face was working pathetically with the stress of her spiritual agony as she pleaded in like manner, "No, Virgie! No, my boy. 'Thou shalt not kill'—the Bible says hit, and ef we kaint put aour faith in 'the Book when trouble comes, whar is aour hope? Virgie, lad; you wouldn't start the old feud up again, would you? Hev you forgotten? Your poor brother killed Malvary's grandfather, and now . . . O Gawd in heaven, don't let him dew hit!" The man shook himself free of his mother's clinging embrace almost roughly, his expression unsoftened.

In turn Rose flung her arms about his shoulders, pleading, "Virgil, listen to your mother—*Omie's* mother. We've got to forgive. It isn't as though . . . Virgil, look at me! Where has your reason

fled to? You're not yourself, just now. Would you wilfully become a murderer? No, no! That's what it would mean. Think of all that is at stake. If you don't care about yourself, think of us, your mother, the work that we are doing for your people. Oh, you must. The Cause . . ."

"Damn the Cause!" he burst out, bitterly. "What do I care for *that*, now? It's my sister. She's dying. He killed her."

"No. It isn't true. Please listen to me, Virgil. *Please!* Omie isn't going to die. In a little while she'll be as well, as happy and as sweet as ever. I promise it, Virgil." Rose was weeping from the very intensity of her supplication and the apparent futility of it. "I promise that, Virgil, and I want you to promise something, too. Say you'll go home; lie down and rest a little while. Of course you're all unstrung, now; but you'll see all these things in a different, a brighter light, bye and bye."

"Yes, Virgie, boy. You dew like Rose says. Go home and lay daown," entreated Mrs. Gayheart, and Smiles added, "Rest. After a little while I'll send Camille over to you with some breakfast." With tender appeal she drew her arms closer about his neck.

"*Breakfast!*"

There was a world of bitter scorn in his voice, but he nevertheless yielded to her plea, breaking away and running down the steps and across to his own cottage. He entered it, and closed the door behind him.

As he disappeared, Smiles turned to Camille, her face pale and drawn from the fight she had fought, and commanded tensely, "Hurry and find Bill Cress; run, Camille. Mally is certainly hiding somewhere on the mountains and, for Virgil's sake as well as his own, we must start a posse in search of him, before . . ."

She did not need to finish her sentence, for the girl was already running down the steps on her errand. The final words of Rose's plea to Virgil had produced a complete reversal in her feelings. It was not that she had any greater sympathy for the fugitive, yet; but the other must not be permitted to carry out his threat. Breathless, Camille arrived at Bill's new and neat little cottage and implored his unwilling wife to call him from the sleep into which he had but a few moments before fallen, stretched, fully clothed, upon the bed. When he had been aroused, she told her story, while the crowd of half-clad children stood and listened, open-mouthed. She ended with Rose's command, and added her own entreaty to it that he hurry to collect some of the neighbors and go up into the hills, not to kill, but to warn Malvary of his peril and get him away, somewhere, before the added tragedy which threatened should occur.

Bill at length assented, rebelliously, saying that he would collect a posse and commence the hunt. He further intimated that he could guess where the fugitive was hiding, for would he not instinctively have fled to the hidden cave which had sheltered

him and his father, for months, and previously furnished a place of refuge for the speaker himself?

He was bound up, heart and soul, in Smiling Pass and, like all the rest, deeply fond of the merry little Omie. Now the expression on his face caused a clutch of fear at Camille's heart, even while his words brought reassurance to her mind. Virgil might be saved, but what of Mally? The girl's blind fury against the one who would have betrayed her dear companion's trusting love, and which had caused her to cry, "*he should die,*" had passed a little now, and she caught her breath with a painful sob, as the thought was brought sharply home to her that he, scarcely more than a boy, might actually be facing death by violence within an hour, especially if, after the manner of mountain men, he should resist Bill and the others.

Camille parted from Bill at the cottage door and slowly retraced her steps to Smiling Pass, which was now indeed outwardly true to its name, for Nature does not adapt her varying moods to suit the moods of men, whose temporal woes are naught in the great scheme of infinite things. There might well be deep shadows this morning in the hearts of those who dwelt in that particular spot, but nevertheless it was outwardly filled with a blaze of golden sunlight, and spring, robed in palest green dotted with the redbuds' lavender bloom and the white masses of flowering dogwood, was smiling there. The generations of man, with their pain and tears and joy and laughter, pass away and are gone like the grass

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that withereth, but the world goes on, unheeding, and, if it be springtime, joyous in its re-birth.

The last of the pupils were entering the dining-hall to eat their morning meal in constrained and frightened silence; but Camille turned in the opposite direction. She crossed the little foot-bridge, which now took the place of the stepping stones across the creek to the spot where stood the Gayheart cottage, and hesitatingly knocked upon the door.

There was no answer, and, after twice repeating her summons, more sharply, the girl opened the door and entered. In the stress of the moment she was utterly forgetful of every rule. It was enough that Virgil needed her strength and comfort—if he were still there. A swift fear born of that thought made her press her hand hard against her throbbing heart as she called his name, first softly, then insistently. Still no answer came, and she ran to the door of his bedroom and pushed it wide open. That room, too, was empty. Virgil had gone! Where . . . and why?

Camille had been in the chamber often when its occupant was absent, helping Mrs. Gayheart clean it or make up the narrow iron bed. She knew where each thing stood therein—the bed; the two rush-bottomed chairs; the plain dresser—upon it her own picture, a snapshot taken by Philip and inscribed, "From your Belgian sister," between one of his mother and one of Omie; the home-made rack full of serious books; his army rifle The corner in which it always leaned was empty!

Camille gave a dry sob and dropped, prone, upon the unrumpled bed with its spotless "kivverlid" which she had woven with her own hands in the fascinating true lover's knot pattern that she and Omie had discovered in their old cabin. Her whole being became a prayer.

She might have lain there for half an hour, or more, unconscious even of time and place, or whether she was actually living. Her entire world had become one of unrealities; her soul and thoughts were alike separated from her body and vainly attempting to follow the man who had gone—somewhere. The happy life which had been her's during the past two years was utterly blotted out, as though she had never known anything but the horrors of war and this new, and greater, horror. She lay under a black shadow, through which no gleam of light might pass. It enveloped her mind completely and cut it off from all things, save two which kept it company. They were fear . . . and love. For the girl knew, at last, that Virgil *was* her whole world, and he had gone, leaving emptiness.

Suddenly she started upright, brought abruptly back to equally painful realities by a noise that beat upon her brain like a hammer—the sound of distant shots, far, far up on the summit of one of the opposite hills. There were a number, some light and sharp, some louder and deeper. Hundreds of times she had heard their like before in Belgium and France, and

again and again in her dreams. They came from an army rifle. Whose?

For the first time in her life Camille slipped to the floor in a dead faint.

All save one of the hurriedly collected posse had returned. They had brought and laid upon the porch of the House of Happiness the motionless form of Malvary Amos, now concealed from the misty or tear-filled eyes of the group on the other side of it, by tattered coats. Rose, Philip and Margaret were there and behind them Donald, on his crutches, and Camille, clutching his arm in agony. A little further off were some of the girls from the weaving room and boys from the printing office. The little boys were, fortunately, at school.

Zenas Tittle was speaking.

"We heared thet thar shootin' when we was most tew the top uv the maounting," he said. "Me and Bill got thar first and seed Mally, hyar, layin' on the ground with Virgie standin' near him with thet thar army rifle uv his'n in his hand. He didn't make no objection when we tuck him, but he kept a-sayin' over and over, sort of dazed-like, 'I didn't dew hit. I swear I didn't dew hit.' I reckon thet he was kind uv crazy from . . . from everything. But, ef he didn't dew hit, then my name haint Zenas Tittle. Hit's an open and shet case agin him."

There was no voice of dissent raised, even in the aching hearts of those who saw the picture through his eyes.

"Was he . . . was Virgil wounded?" whispered Rose.

"No. Mally must hev shot three or four times, but I reckon he war rattled."

"Where is he, now?"

"They started tew walk daown tew Fayville—him and Bill. Virgie said that he war going tew give himself up, and he allaowed that he'd ruther not cum back hyar, first."

"Then he's in prison! *Oh, mon Dieu!*" Camille spoke in a faint voice.

"Not yet he haint, I don't reckon, Camilly. But he will be right smart ef they keep on the way they started aout—hit haint but ten miles, takin' the short cut over the maounting. I allaows, though, thet you-all can get him bailed aout a-fore night."

"Yes," cried Rose. "Someone must see the County Judge and get hold of John Combs at once. Oh, whom can we send? If John were only here . . ."

"Where in the devil is John?" Philip broke in with irritation in his tone. "He ought to be around today, of all days, and I haven't seen him once."

Rose caught her breath sharply, and a quick flush dispelled for an instant the pallor of her face. Only one saw it, however, but Donald, with a smothered groan, turned from the doorway and swung himself painfully back to the room where his baby daughter lay, still feverishly fretful. "Muvver. Where are you, muvver? I want you," she was sobbing. Donald lowered himself to a chair beside the crib, and bent

over until his head rested on the edge of it which pressed deep into his forehead. "And we called this 'Smiling Pass' and 'The House of Happiness'," he muttered through clinched teeth. The baby stopped sobbing and gently patted his unshaven cheek. "It's wuff, daddy," she said.

Out on the porch Rose was continuing hastily, "I can't let you go, Phil. Omie needs a doctor near her every minute, and poor Donald isn't himself today. And *I* need you, too. Everything is dropping to pieces and my morale with it, I'm afraid." She caught his hand and held it tightly.

"I'll go. I'm going, anyway," said Camille with sudden resolution.

"Camille! You can't."

"I can. I'm going to."

"Of course, and I shall go with her," exclaimed Margaret, decisively.

"Margaret, you *are* a brick," Philip exclaimed, for the second time.

CHAPTER VI

THE CROSS

SCARCELY a quarter of an hour had elapsed before the two girls were riding Fayvillewards on Margaret's sturdy little mules. Even under normal conditions the three hour trip would have been a most wearing one that day, for the road was deep with innumerable mudholes and gullies, and the waters of the creek were swollen until their rocks and boulders were covered. The sure-footed animals had to pick their way, most of the time in single file, and conversation between their riders was made almost impossible.

Besides, Camille's heart was too fully charged for utterance and Margaret guessed her secret and was sympathetically silent. There are times when even the most consoling words are superfluous. The day was unseasonably hot, its sultriness adding to their manifold discomforts, and they were shaken and weary long before the little mining town, which was their destination, appeared in view below them, as they turned the last of many abrupt corners.

Fayville was normally the most simple and somnolent of places—a few score of scattering homes which lined one narrow street on either side of a little collection of larger drab buildings—the county

Court House, railroad station, miscellaneous stores and the like. But, to the astonished gaze of the new arrivals, it seemed suddenly to have been changed into a tiny section of a bustling metropolis. The sun had dried the surface mud of its unpaved thoroughfare, and gray dust hung in clouds above it in the breathless air and, as they drew near, they saw that hundreds of horses and mules lined either side, tied to every available post and fence rail, while many more were galloping madly back and forth under the whip or spur of yelling riders.

Wholly unknown to them, they had come to the County Seat upon the opening day of the Circuit Court's spring term, and *that* was a red letter day in the country's traditional calendar. Not only did it mark the start of the political campaigns for the season, but it was "swappin' day" and the man or boy who had a mount upon which to ride thither, and returned home without having traded something—from a jackknife to a pair of blooded horses—counted the year incomplete.

The narrow sidewalks were filled, likewise, with women and girls clad in their best spring dresses, eager and amused spectators at the bickering groups of bartering men, many of whom had renewed acquaintance with the little brown jug that morning, with the result that faces were flushed and voices pitched high. Under the feet of men and mules, everywhere scurried squealing pigs and squawking hens. Dogs barked, horses neighed, mules brayed.

And through this bedlam and motley crowd of merry-makers, the two girls rode slowly, with heavy hearts and new timidity, bred of the reckless hilarity and the proximity of wheeling and rearing steeds.

At length they reached the ugly, red-brick Court House, its yard thronging with people from whose number men were detaching themselves as a clerk upon the balcony loudly called the name of this or that one, who was wanted within for the grand jury which was then being impaneled.

They dismounted, and Margaret, seeing that her little companion was well-nigh panic-stricken, entered the portal of the lower story, whose barred windows proclaimed that the building also served as the county jail. She finally discovered a shirt-sleeved, perspiring man, whose unbuttoned, shabby vest bore a sheriff's badge, and accosted him with a request for information about Virgil Gayheart.

He stared at her in frank surprise for a moment, for he was clearly harried by the pressing duties of the day. Then he drawled, "Virgil Gayheart? Oh, yes, he cum in hyar with Bill Cress abaout an hour ago, and give himself up for shootin' somebody, up tew Beaten. That the fellow you mean?"

"Yes," answered the girl with a catch in her voice. "Oh, please. Where is he?"

"I dunno. We didn't hev no room fer him, hyar. Sheriff Spurlock pulled a raid on a moonshine still last night, and all the cells war full."

"You . . . you *don't know* where he is?"

"I reckon . . . yes, cum tew think uv hit, he said he'd be over tew the boarding house, thar, until we hed a place fer him. You'll find him thar, I guess."

Margaret gasped, despite the fact that she had become fairly well versed in the informality attending the administration of mountain penal law. She hurried back to Camille and, leading their mounts, the two made their way down the crowded street toward the house indicated by the officer. But half way there Margaret stopped, for her eye had caught the name of the attorney-at-law, whom they had likewise come to seek, painted upon a window above the general store. She turned into the narrow doorway and Camille, too anxious to wait longer, hurried on.

There were a number of coat-and-collarless men lounging on the piazza of the boarding house, and they regarded her curiously as she ran up the step and past them, her eyes lowered. But, in the single glance which she had bestowed upon them, she had recognized two, although she had seen them but once, and then but for an instant, two years before. They had been among those who had jeered at her discomfiture and Virgil's gallantry, on the afternoon of her arrival in Fayville. Camille's fast-beating heart throbbed more quickly still. Even then he had been her knight; and now she was going to see him, and tell him so.

The proprietor followed her in through the door and, when he asked what he might do for her, she cried, "Oh, sir, is Virgil . . . Virgil Gayheart here? They told us at . . . at the prison that he was."

"I reckon he air. I give him a room upstairs," was the answer.

"Please, I want to see him. Oh, *quickly*."

"Hmmm. You wants tew see him, eh? Wall . . ."

"Yes, yes." Suddenly the strangeness of her request was borne in upon her mind and she stammered, desperately, "It's all right. I . . . I'm his sister."

" 'His sister'? Thet's funny. I heared thet he hed killed a fellow fer . . . I mean thet I thought his sister was dyin'."

"No. That . . . that one is Omie; but she isn't dying. I . . . I am another one. Oh, please, sir, send word to him; say it is Camille. He . . . he will understand."

The man softened at the sight of her pitiful distress and said, not unkindly, "Well, ef you're a sister uv his'n I guess hit's all right. You-all go right up. Hit's the first room on the left."

Camille hesitated only for a second. Then she flew up the stairs and knocked on the door of the room which he had indicated. .

"Come in," answered a muffled voice. She obeyed and stepped into the shabby little chamber, The man whom she sought was seated in a straight-backed chair, facing the window, his hands clasped in his lap and working nervously. For a moment he did not turn his head; but, when he did, he sprang to his feet with a startled cry, "Camille! *You?*"

The girl closed the door behind her.

"Philip, what do you honestly think about Donald's condition?" asked Rose in an undertone, as they stepped out together from the House of Happiness and walked across the porch to the railing. The twilight hour had come again and the baby had fallen asleep, plainly much better. Omie, too, was sleeping naturally, for the first time, and gave promise of a rapid recovery to full health, so part of the weight had been lifted from their minds. But plenty remained, and her husband's almost complete silence, and his more-than-ever marked reserve caused her to ask the question.

"It's hard to say," answered her brother. "Of course the past twenty-four hours have been hell for him, sitting helpless in that chair—he hasn't even had the relief which the rest of us have found in being kept everlastingly busy. I've been disappointed in his condition, though, in spite of the fact that you wrote that the rainy season had started the trouble up again. It's been almost two years and a half, now, hasn't it?"

"Yes. What a crying shame it is, Phil! We can't blame him for having become discouraged and a . . . a little morose, can we? I'm sure that I don't; I am much more distressed that I can't help him bear his pain, and I sometimes reproach myself for having given so much time to the work here, and other sick people, and so little to comforting him. He . . . he and Junior are my whole world, Phil." Her voice caught a little.

"I know. You've done everything possible, dear child, unless—I wonder if an operation of the nature you suggested in your letter might not effect a complete and permanent cure, since apparently rest and ordinary treatment have only brought him partial relief? I wish that I knew more about sciatica. It's a devilish disease."

"It is, indeed. I know that Don has suffered perfectly excruciating pain at times, and, even when he was comparatively free from it, he was very lame and walked with his knee bent, treading on his toes to relieve the tension on the nerve. And his relapses have been frequent, sometimes coming when we were most encouraged. We've tried almost everything—everything but morphine, Donald simply won't have it; but he has let us inject distilled water into the nerve, and that has sometimes relieved the pain with surprising promptness.

"But now I feel sure that the nerve is so contracted that artificial stretching is absolutely necessary, if he is ever really to walk again. Dr. Osler used to advise it in extreme cases and John has for a long while been wanting to try it."

"Where in the dickens is John?" he demanded, for the second time that day. "He's the queerest fellow that I ever saw. I suppose that he's off on some desperate case. The work he's doing here is rather fine, I've got to admit; but he's so darned secretive that I can't make him out at all. Sometimes I think that I like him tremendously, and then

again I'm half sorry that I ever introduced him to you and Don."

"Oh, no, Phil. He's worked wonderfully, both for us and with us. I don't know how we could have got along without him. He's utterly different from most men but I . . . I like him."

Rose had not been able wholly to keep the distress from her voice at the start, but her final declaration rang so true that Philip turned and glanced at her quickly.

"Do you know," he said, "I've thought a good many times about that crazy prophecy of Aunt Lissy's. Of course it was painfully obvious whom she meant when she said that he was hopelessly in love with a woman who belonged to another, and I've wondered . . ."

"Philip, *don't!*" cried his sister, sharply.

"Look here, Rose. Has John ever . . . ?"

"No, no. Of course not!"

The woman's conscience smote her. She had told a deliberate lie, and, although it was to shield another, and there was not even in the background of her mind the slightest thought of saving herself from suspicion, the knowledge of her offense gave her bitter pain.

"Good. I'm glad of that, anyway. If he had—especially if Donald had got wind of it, in his present mental condition—I never should have forgiven myself for having brought you two together. Does he often go away without saying anything, like this?"

"No. Not . . . often."

For an instant Rose trembled on the verge of a tearful confession which her heart clamored to make; but the moment passed with the words unspoken, for there had come from the turn in the road the dull sound of hoofs at a sharp trot on the soft road-bed and, by the fast-fading light, they saw Camille and Margaret riding up to the gate. The two hurried down the steps and steep path to meet them, but Billy Boy had arrived from somewhere and reached the gate first. Unless he were in school, or asleep, he could almost invariably be found with his beloved Margaret, or waiting for her to appear.

Philip swung first one of the worn-out girls, and then the other, from the saddle and Margaret did not instantly free herself from his semi-embrace, while Camille flung her arms passionately about Rose and cried, brokenly, "Oh, Virgil is innocent, *Souris*. He did not do it. He told me so, and I know that it is the truth. But I am so, *so* happy."

She fell to sobbing. All that she had that day been called upon to endure, combined with her utter weariness, had broken her down at last. The other held her close, realizing the fact; but, for the moment, only half-comprehending Camille's assertion, and thinking more of comforting her than of demanding an explanation of the seemingly impossible statement.

Not so Philip.

"What?" he cried. "He still says that he didn't shoot Mally. Then how . . . who . . . ?"

It was Margaret who answered, excitedly, "Yes, he swears that he did not and that someone must have taken his rifle. Oh, Phil, could any other of our boys have done it? They were all nearly as angry as Rose said that he was, and several hated Malvary, anyway, he was so hot tempered. If one did, it would be almost as terrible."

Rose turned suddenly from Camille. The declaration of Virgil's avowed innocence had finally flooded her heart with the sunlight of a great happiness, over which this further suggestion cast a dimming cloud.

"What did he say?" she begged, as, in the now almost complete darkness, they started to climb the hill, leaving Billy Boy to lead the mules to the barn.

"He told us that he stayed in the cottage only a few minutes, for he thought that he should go mad, cooped up there," answered Margaret. "He had to get away, and walk as hard as he could."

"I can understand. Poor boy," Rose whispered.

"At first he went blindly, with no idea of his direction; but, after a while, he began to think more sanely; the light came to him and he knew that you were right. By this time he was half way up the mountain and, as he looked towards the top, he saw the broken rock where the cave is—the one where we go picnicking, you know—and something seemed to tell him that Mally was hiding there. Virgil went on, straight towards it; but he swears that he was unarmed and merely intended to tell him that Omie

wasn't dead, and that he could return home. He didn't pretend that he had forgiven him, but he meant to be just, and let him get his things and leave, unmolested.

"He said that he had almost reached the top, and was going pretty slowly, for it is very rocky there, and filled with big crevasses, when he heard the . . . the shooting above him. He ran as fast as he could, frightened, just as we were, and reached the spot where Malvary lay, only a minute or two before Bill Cress and Tobias got there. Mally was dead, poor boy, and Virgie had just started to look about for the one who had killed him, when he caught sight of a rifle, lying under a bush. He picked it up—and realized that it was his own.

"He was completely dazed by the shock, and the thought of what it would be thought to mean, that he could hardly answer the two men at all, when they appeared and caught hold of him."

"But, in the name of heaven, didn't he make them search for the real murderer?" broke in Philip.

"Yes. At least he insisted that Bill do so—Billy had placed him under arrest and ordered the other men in the posse to start down with Mally at once, for some of them thought that the boy might not be dead, after all. Bill didn't believe him, then, although I think that he must, now, for he left Virgil alone in the boarding-house . . ."

"'The *boarding-house*'?" echoed Rose in bewilderment.

Margaret explained, and then went on. "They searched for several minutes, but found no one, and the only traces left—broken branches and things like that, I suppose—might have been made by Virgil, as well as another, of course."

"Thank God, thank God that it was not he!" breathed the other. "Oh, Camille, I am so glad . . . for you, dearest."

No answer came out of the darkness, and she cried, "Why, where *is* Camille?"

The girl was no longer with them. In the enveloping shadows she had stolen away, run quickly across the little bridge, and entered the Gayheart's cabin.

And now, still in the darkness, she was kneeling beside Virgil's bed, clasping something tightly against her breast.

"I have no right, now, to accept your love, dear heart," Virgil had said at noonday, tasting the bitter-sweet of her frank confession at a time when the most terrible of accusations hung, like a sword of Damacles, over his head. And she had answered with the same spirit which had inspired her king, six years before, to choose the path of honor, regardless of the dangers and the griefs by which it was beset. She would not compromise with Fate, but, side by side with him, would face what it had in store, be it shadow or sunshine.

Her love had broken down the barrier of his determination for a moment, and he had caught her in

his arms, murmuring almost incoherent phrases of pain and happiness. Then he had loosed her, crying, "It is not right. I will not have it so, now."

"Now, more than ever is it right, Virgie," Camille had answered. "For what is love if it has not within it faith to believe and courage to endure? And love is doubled by being shared. You would not refuse me this, without which my world would be empty of all things, *mon aimé*?"

She had conquered, at length, and left him filled with a great happiness which banished fear. But before she went he had said earnestly, "You know I have no ring to give you as a pledge, Camille, and we should not even think of being engaged—yet. But there is one thing which I value more, I think, than anything else I own, because it stands for something that I—I told you and Rose and Donald about on the first night that I knew, and loved you. I want you to have and keep it, always. I shall not tell you what it is but, although you have never seen it you will know it, and understand. It is in a little box in the top drawer of my dresser."

She held it, now, tightly clasped against her breast, his *croix de guerre*, for valor on the day when he received the second wound, which expiated the first.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLOUDBURST

THE sleep of exhaustion bound all save one of the dwellers in Smiling Pass that night, but Rose scarcely closed her eyes. Fatigued as she was of body and mind, the multitudinous anxieties of the moment, and problems to be faced on the morrow, which beset her, would not cease from troubling and give the weary rest. Hour after hour she lay by Donald's side, staring wide-eyed into the darkness and not daring so much as to move, lest she disturb him, although her every nerve was on edge.

Soon after nightfall the rain had begun again, and all through the dragging hours she listened to its alternate patter and pounding assault upon the low roof, and to the ever-increasing sound of the creek below, as it gathered volume and power.

And over and over again the same questions presented themselves, clamoring for answer, only to be momentarily banished, unsatisfied. Was Virgil really innocent, after all; and, if so, could his innocence be established in the face of the damning evidence against him? And, if not he, who was guilty? Surely not one of their own boys; they had all been accounted for. An outsider, perhaps? Some-

one with whom the impulsive Malvary had started a personal feud, and who had stolen Virgil's rifle in order that its distinctive bullets might lead the authorities off upon a false trail? If that were true Omie's tragedy might have nothing whatever to do with the boy's death. There was a grain of comfort in the thought!

Rose dismissed this train of thought only to begin on another, equally distressing. Would they, collectively, be blamed for what had happened, and their double misfortune materially set back the work of the school, or destroy its value altogether? It was wholly possible. Other unfortunate incidents, over which they had had no more control, had seriously hurt their cause.

Then John Hunter rose like a specter to trouble her mind. Had remorse caused him to flee her face altogether? Supposing he should never return, what would people think—what would Donald say—and ask? Must she go on, living the lie which she had told Philip—venial as it was? Rose shuddered. These, and a hundred other troublesome thoughts, trod upon each other in continual procession through her aching brain.

Dawn brought a temporary clearing in the weather and the threads of everyday life were picked up, one by one. Breakfast was prepared and eaten; Camille resumed her work with the older girls in the weaving room; Margaret rode off to the new school-

house, where she and Noey Scytha jointly presided, surrounded by her paddling flock of little boys; Philip devoted himself to the sick girl and the sick man in turn, and Rose was overwhelmed with her own duties and the general supervision of the establishment—a task which normally kept Virgil on the jump—in addition.

At ten o'clock the sun burst radiantly forth from the clouds and Donald acceded to the suggestion of his brother-in-law that he have his chair placed upon the porch. Junior went out, too, and straightway began to race up and down the long veranda as merrily as though there had never been such a thing as illness in her world. Her father watched her at her play, with the first smile of many hours upon his drawn countenance.

At last Philip stepped out of the little hospital doorway, intercepted her in the middle of one of her pattering excursions, and tossed her at arms length into the air, exclaiming, "Here, you little skallawag, do you want me to put you back to bed again to stop you from catching pneumonia on those wet boards?"

"What's a pneumonia? I don't see any, Uncle Phil," she answered, squirming in the air and looking down at the piazza for something, she knew not what.

"You don't see it, you *feel* it . . . here, in your little insides." He prodded her plump little chest.

"But muvver said I was insidedly better this morning," she protested, and Donald smiled again, wanely.

"I guess you are . . . *insidely*. How would you like to have me throw you 'way down there, and into the creek?" he demanded, swinging her legs out over the railing.

"It's big, isn't it? Is the ocean bigger'n that?" Little Rose loved to hear stories of her mother's trip across the Atlantic, but her conception of its size was decidedly vague.

"Let's see. Yes, at least twice as big," seriously responded her uncle, and Donald interjected, "Careful, Phil. Little pitchers have long memories, as well as big ears, and when she sees the real thing you may lose your reputation for veracity."

"Right-o. It *has* come up astonishingly, hasn't it?" he added, regarding the turbulent, muddy stream, which, the day before, had been little more than a brooklet, and was now rushing along almost up to the top of its banks and twenty feet wide.

"If you think so, you should stay here until a couple of months from now, and see it during a real cloudburst. The sky just opens and lets down a deluge sometimes, and these mountains are so steep and close together that the water simply streams into the valleys from both sides, and the creeks rise, from almost nothing at all, to three, and even four feet deep in next to no time. Rattlesnake and Coon both feed into Beaten, and it simply goes mad temporarily. We've several times seen pigs and lambs, and once a half-grown calf, brought down by it."

"It was dwounded, poor thing," explained Junior, adding more brightly, "I had a little calf last summer, when I was a baby. But he growed up into a caow."

Certain words, which she heard the natives speak more often than members of her family, she invariably pronounced in mountain fashion, nor could they break her of it.

"You don't say!" said Philip, and Donald—who had hardly heard the child's interruption—answered, "It's a fact, and occasionally 'a tide'—as they call it—will occur before there is a sign of rain here, if there is a local cloudburst somewhere up-stream. You can actually see the wall of water coming down like a miniature tidal wave. Humpty Hite told us about it in rather picturesque phraseology when we first came, and before we had personally made the acquaintance of one. Said he, 'When one uv them thar claud-bursts cums, this creek rises three foot in an hour, does hits do, and in no time hit's jest a leetle trickle again'."

"Which air a fact," agreed Rose, smiling, as she joined them after correcting a page of pamphlet proof in the printing-office, and she added, "I've got to run over and see Mrs. Gayheart about what to order from Judd's store for dinner. Do you want to come with mother, dear?"

"Yes. I want to go play with Virgie," promptly responded the child, for never was she happier than when romping with the man who was no longer there.

The shadow returned to the faces of the others and her mother answered, sadly, "Your Virgie is away, today, darling. Wasn't it like him to refuse to have us go bail for him, Don? With the Grand Jury in session now, we may hear . . . tonight, whether he is going to be held for trial. Oh, dear."

"There's no question about it," answered Philip. "They can hardly help bringing in anything but a 'true bill.' Lawyer Combs is coming up here this afternoon, isn't he?"

"Yes. You knew that Judd went down with the jolt wagon this morning, taking Bud and Tobias and two of the other members of the posse, didn't you? Of course Bill Cress stayed there all night."

Philip nodded. "It looks black for the boy, but Margaret says that she is sure he was telling the truth when he described to them how he happened to be in such an absolutely damning position, and that's good enough for me."

His sister gave him a quick glance, but he was too much engrossed in his thoughts to notice it, and went on, "The attorney may have some line of defence in mind, when he comes."

"Oh, I hope so! I scarcely think of anything else and there doesn't seem to be a single ray of light. So many different ones heard him swear that he was going to find and kill poor Mally, only a little more than an hour before it . . . it happened; and then for him to have been found where he was, and holding that rifle . . . !"

"Try not to think of it. It is just as true in everyday life, as in plays and books, that circumstantial evidence, which seems to be just as conclusive as that, often falls to pieces, at the last moment."

"I know. We must hope and pray that it will, this time—yes, and *work* for that end, just as soon as Mr. Combs comes and gives us a line to work on."

"Of course."

"I'll be back in a few minutes. Come, Junie, we must hurry—run. It looks as though it were getting ready to rain again. Kiss daddy, dear. Be careful, honey, you musn't hit his poor, sore leg."

"Why does you always have a poor, sore leg, daddy?" inquired the baby, with her arms clasped tightly around his neck and her cheek against his. "I falled down and made my knee all bluggy, once, but it was *all* well, tomorrow."

"And perhaps daddy's will be, soon," answered her mother, with a forced smile and a futile attempt to make her tone sound convincing.

She bent and lightly kissed her husband's forehead, twice, despite his unresponsiveness, and left him, tense and silent. Hand in hand the two ran down the veranda steps and the hillside path. They paused an instant on the little bridge, to turn and wave—Philip acknowledging their salute—and then ran on and into the Gayheart cottage.

"Phil!" demanded Donald suddenly. "Has . . . has Rose . . . changed, or is the trouble all with me?"

"It's all with you, old man." The other spoke quietly; but his voice was not without sympathy.

"I'm not so sure of that, Phil. Night before last . . . Never mind, I have no right to speak of it."

"Donald, has anything gone wrong? Tell me; perhaps I can . . . Wait a minute. Omie's calling, but I'll be right back."

He hurried into the little hospital, leaving the other man alone with his cheerless thoughts and the new problem. Should he tell Rose's brother what he had seen?

Before Philip was free to return it had begun to sprinkle, and Donald got painfully to his feet and, leaning upon his stout cane, limped into the house, where he resumed his cushioned chair at the front window of the office, so that he could watch for the return of his baby.

"Rose should have had more sense than to have taken her even that little distance," he thought, with growing irritation. "They will get drenched, and perhaps Junior, her powers of resistance lowered by her illness, will take cold and be sick again."

He looked out anxiously to see if they were in sight. Already the whole heavens to the southwest were covered by a dense black cloud which was, with surprising rapidity, driving up the valley between the mountain peaks as through a funnel. An unnatural darkness was descending, oppressively. Through it came the sound of rushing wind, and he could see the rain advancing in almost a solid sheet,

like a moving gray curtain. Why didn't they come?

Then there fell on his ears another sound—a dull roar from the head of the creek, and the waters below him seemed to swell, leap more tumultuously and sweep forward faster still. It was altogether too early in the season for such a cloudburst as he had described to Philip, but a few minutes before; yet one was occurring!

The wind struck the house with such force that it fairly trembled, but the rain had stopped suddenly. Now, in the dimmed light, he saw his wife appear in the cottage doorway, with the baby, wrapped in some sort of garment, in her arms. She paused there, momentarily, as though uncertain whether or not to attempt to cross the little space which separated them from home. She started to run.

Donald leaned forward and flung the window up.

“Go back!” he shouted, wildly, but the words were caught from his lips by the clutching fingers of the wind and hurled away, down the valley. At the same instant the tumbling black cloud—now directly overhead—let down a perfect deluge of rain, and the swelling waters of the creek, already half-way up the frail supports of the little bridge, struck it anew with mad fury. Rose had reached the middle of it, and there the force of wind and rain fairly pinned her against the leeward railing, while the narrow planks on which she stood trembled and swayed as though the whole were on the point of being swept away from beneath her.

For the fraction of a second Donald was utterly paralyzed by fear. Was the bridge going to collapse, as it had once before under like conditions, and hurl his loved ones into that rushing torrent?

To only a few men in a generation come moments like that, and then the brain is either rendered incapable of acting, or made to work with incredible rapidity. In Donald's case it was the latter, and his mind registered simultaneously two ideas. He saw the picture before his eyes and knew the desperate need of immediate action; but, at the same time, he saw in a vision another scene whose setting was different from, yet strangely coincident in many respects with, the one upon which he was gazing. Memory had leaped back over a span of four years. In a single flash of recollection he saw Rose—the girl he loved, apparently in vain—upon a little pier about which the waves of the North Atlantic were dashing, and, in the black waters beneath her, the head of another child. He saw her leap into the flood. He saw himself, bound in the grip of fell circumstance, just as he was now, witnessing it all by the lightning's vivid glare, yet helpless to aid. He saw another man, one who also loved her, spring down the steep shore to rescue her from death.

It was all in an instant, and then he realized that now, as then, another had appeared to save her. And it was the same man!

Philip had leaped from the doorway of the little hospital and the force of the wind had caught, and

pinned his slender form momentarily against the wall.

"God! He *cannot* do it again!" Donald cried aloud.

At such rare moments, too, the human will is sometimes vouchsafed the privilege of summoning to itself a superhuman power, under whose impulsion the physical being performs free of natural restraints. So it was, now, with Donald.

With but one impulse possessing him wholly, he, who, for more than two years, had not even walked without a cane to support him, sprang from his cushioned chair and ran out into the storm. He was not conscious of pain or weakness, or of his body at all; his only thought was that his wife and child were in danger, and *he* must reach them, instantly.

Philip was now running down the steps, but Donald leaped past him.

The necessity of opening the gate at the foot of the sharp descent checked his course, but only for a second. Now he was at the end of the trembling, yielding bridge; on it; he had torn the baby from Rose's frantic clasp and, clutching her arm, dragged them both back to the bank.

The other man was beside him, half-supporting the woman whose drenched and wind-whipped skirt so wound itself about her legs that she could scarcely stand. Some of the older boys were racing towards them, eager to help, if they could. To the first to arrive Donald held out the baby, blindly, for it seemed to him that a stream of liquid fire had been

poured into the veins of his right leg, consuming it, turning it to ashes. He pitched forward into black oblivion.

When he returned to consciousness, Donald vaguely realized that he was lying on a narrow hospital cot and that his leg was aching violently, yet the pain was not like that which he had suffered and borne for many months. He had felt its like before, however, and for a brief instant thought that he was back in the Stillman infirmary at Harvard, whither he had been carried from the football field, after having been pulled, unconscious, from the bottom of a *melée*, with his leg twisted so violently that many ligaments had been torn asunder within his thigh.

Donald opened his eyes and started, upon seeing Omie, pale and frightened, lying on a cot close beside his. He closed them again, but the present flowed back with the sound of his wife's voice, speaking excitedly at the other side of his bed.

"How did he *do* it? How did he ever manage to do it, Phil?" she was crying.

"God only knows. I suppose that the call of the moment overcame his weakness and . . . Good, he's coming to. How do you feel, old man?"

"All . . . all right, thanks."

Suddenly he demanded, "Did the bridge go?"

"You bet it did—about ten seconds after you got off it. Every damned stick! I tell you, that was a close call, Don. Darn your hide, how did you ever . . ."

Rose slipped in front of Philip and clasped one of her husband's hands feverishly.

"Dearest, are you in terrible pain? I'm just heart-broken, for it was my fault. I shouldn't have started," she exclaimed. Her lips were trembling, and, although her light garments were drenched and clinging to her form, and water was dripping from her hair, she looked so utterly sweet and appealing that Donald's heart swelled with a love, a craving for her which was actually painful. The one word whose utterance might have driven away all intervening doubts was on his lips; but the hand of the specter thing pressed it back and he answered by demanding, "Where is Junie?"

"At home. Camille is changing her clothes. She is all right, but you, Don—how do you feel?"

"As though I had had my leg pulled." He gave a twisted smile.

"Philip! Do you suppose . . . ?"

"I shouldn't be surprised in the least. The nerve most certainly got a sufficiently violent stretching to kill or cure, and Mother Nature may have performed that last resort operation for him—free of charge. Don, if it turns out to be a fact, all I've got to say is that you're a lucky devil."

"I half believe . . . that you're right," gasped the sufferer, clenching his teeth to hold back a groan. "There is pain enough, Heaven knows; but it . . . it isn't neuralgic in the least. I feel as though that cursed sciatic nerve had simply been ripped to pieces

—as I've wished, plenty of times, that it might be."

Rose fell to her knees beside the bed, "Oh, my husband!" she cried. "If it's true—if it only *is* true! And I believe it. Something told me from the start that these mountains held your cure, although I did not think that it would come this way. 'I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which hath made heaven and earth', " she quoted tearfully. Then she buried her tear-stained face in the breast of his rain-soaked coat.

Hesitatingly, Donald reached out his arm and drew it closer and closer about her shaking form.

CHAPTER VIII

CLEARING

By mid-afternoon the sky was cloudless and the sun blazing gloriously down upon a shining world, strewn with branches and blossoms, as though for a fete. The raging waters of the creek had subsided, if not to "jest a leetle trickle," at least to their ordinary springtime dimensions, and the only lasting visible evidence of the morning's drama was the demolished bridge. But a few slender uprights, with pieces of plank clinging to them, now remained to mark the spot where Rose had stood.

Donald had been moved to his own bed in the House of Happiness, and he lay there with a great content slowly settling upon his soul. In the brightness of the day, and the sudden relief from the maddening pain whose gnawing and burning he had suffered for so long in silence, the cloud was slowly passing from his heart. Rose *did* love him; his black suspicion had been but an evil fantasy born of a brain deranged by illness. He would not even mention to her what he had seen in the moonlight. She might tell him about it, if she would; but, if she did not, it should make no difference. The explanation was now as clear as the day, and John's continued absence,

which jealousy had kept him from so much as commenting upon, established it. He had his own amends to make to his wife; but they might be in general terms and she be spared from the grief of realizing that he had suspected her of such an unthinkable thing as infidelity. He was still in pain, agonizing pain in his thigh and leg, when he moved, but so long as he lay still he experienced a blessed freedom from the kind of anguish which had been his for so long. He need lie no longer with nerves on edge, waiting for the next neuralgic knife-thrust from hip to toe.

And others rejoiced with him. Although a heavy cloud still overhung those who dwelt in Smiling Pass, a new happiness was theirs. Another and more terrible tragedy had been averted that morning, and their doctor, beloved by many and respected by all, despite his frequent periods of moroseness, was going to get well. Smiles herself had told them so, and her word was their law and their gospel.

The day grew hotter and hotter and, when they had returned from the afternoon session at school, the little boys used that fact as an argument in inveigling from Margaret permission to go barefooted for the first time that year. She yielded, with misgivings—for it meant a crop of new bumps and bruises for Rose to tend—and a moment later the benches beside the playground were decorated with twenty pairs of shoes and stockings—some of them the first “boughten” ones their owners had ever had—, and the boys were loudly rejoicing in the new freedom.

Virgil's dog, "Marshal Foch," who had moped dejectedly ever since the strange disappearance of his master, began to respond to the general elevation of spirits and, after tearing around with the children for a time, started up the mountainside, barking madly.

"He's after a rabbit! Kin I go, Margaret?" demanded Billy Boy, in excitement. An instant later, they could see a white streak—which was bunny—flash through a little clearing among the underbrush, with the dog's tawny body stretched close to the ground in pursuit. His barking grew fainter and fainter until it was almost inaudible; but it seemed now to come from a fixed spot.

"Billy, remember that a Scout doesn't give pain needlessly and protects the harmless creatures! Yes, you may go, dear, for I think that the Marshal has chased the poor little thing into its burrow and is trying to dig it out. Run, Billy Boy, and stop him."

Delighted with the commission, the child sped up the hillside and Margaret watched him disappear with a smile of maternal affection in her eyes. Philip, standing in the doorway, unobserved, saw it and his heart-beat quickened.

The boy was gone for perhaps twenty minutes, during which time Margaret remained on the veranda, waiting—and dreaming. She had been almost as terrified by the story of what had happened during the morning as though she had actually been a witness to it, but now the sun was so bright, the

world so lovely, that it seemed as though it must be a happy omen, presaging fair weather in their own lives. She heard the sound of breaking branches on the steep hillside above and raised her eyes, to behold Billy returning, with the truant dog. She smiled and waved, but he did not respond, and a moment later he was near enough so that she could see his face, which appeared peculiarly pale and frightened. He was running almost blindly, too, paying no heed to impeding bushes and boulders, over which he stumbled. And his feet and legs were bleeding! "Could something have terrified him, a rattlesnake, perhaps?" she thought. The Marshal often gave them battle.

She ran up the hill to meet him, and the boy, panting, flung himself into her outstretched arms. For a moment he was unable to reply to her anxious inquiries. Then he gasped out in a trembling voice, "Oh, Margaret! I found . . . Marshal found a man up thar. He was layin' in the bushes and he's all covered with blood—I reckon thet he's dead."

Her heart stopped beating. Another tragedy! Another man, killed almost at their very doors!

"No, no, Billy! Are you sure?"

He nodded, gulping.

"Oh, where is he? Could you find him again, Billy?" she demanded, in a voice which sounded faint and strange to herself.

"Yes. I reckon I could . . . ef I has tew. But I don't love tew go up thar again, Margaret," was his sobbing response.

Several of the other boys had run up to join them, already, realizing that something was wrong. Now they burst forth into excited questionings. The preliminary bell for supper was ringing on the porch below, but none of them paid any attention to its summons.

"Quick! Run and call Uncle Phil," she directed, and then added, addressing the others, "Get all of the bigger boys, and Judd, too—I just saw him driving in. Tell them to come here at once—I want them. Tell them to hurry! And don't let Rose know about this," she called in final command.

But Rose heard, nevertheless. Such news as this could not be kept secret. And after she, with Margaret and Camille, had prepared a cot in one of the little hospital rooms, she waited with harrowing anticipations until the cortège, led back, as they had been led up, by Billy and Marshal Foch, slowly appeared from the edge of the forest, with four of them bearing a motionless form as gently as possible. Then she ran to meet them and accosted her brother with the uncompleted question, "Phil, is it . . . ?"

He nodded in telepathic understanding. "Yes. John Hunter, Rose."

"Dead?" There were horror and agony alike in her whisper.

"Not quite. Terribly wounded, though, He was delirious when we found him, but he's fainted or fallen into a comatose condition now."

He drew her aside and she gave one shuddering glance at the inert figure which the boys were carrying past her. Then she swayed towards Philip, closing her burning eyes and pressing her face for an instant hard against his shoulder. The pitiful spectacle was almost more than she, for all her multitude of harrowing experiences in France, could bear. For the man who had been her friend and intimate co-worker for nearly two years was, indeed, as though dead, his face the color of parchment, his clothing stained and drenched, and disclosing the three terrible gunshot wounds.

With her hand clutching Philip's, she fell in step behind the bearers of the heavy burden.

"Phil," she whispered in a strained voice. "Do you suppose that he . . . that Mally . . . ?"

"That's just what I've been thinking and I'm afraid so, though God knows why. We haven't heard any other shooting, and his wounds indicate that he was shot many hours ago."

"But almost a day and a half, Philip! Could he have lived that long, wounded so terribly?"

"It is hard to believe; but he had an exceptional constitution and the rain probably kept him alive—he couldn't have lived unless he had had water. What gets me, though, is how he happened to be where we found him, if what we suspect is true. It's a mile or more to the other peak where Malvary was, and John couldn't have walked a step, wounded

as he is. Besides, he must have been unconscious most of the time."

Rose's tears suddenly overflowed. "Perhaps he didn't do it, but . . . I'm afraid that he did, and that during all these hours, he has been trying to crawl . . . home, Philip."

She could not speak again; the ache in her heart and the choking sensation in her throat were too great.

They laid John gently on the freshly made bed in the hospital which had been his home, and he almost immediately whispered the word, "Water."

Rose poured a few drops between his parched lips and laved his feverish face with the cooling fluid, whereupon he slowly opened his eyes, momentarily conscious and rational, it seemed. He did not speak again, however, while Philip was cutting away his clothing in order to examine his wounds; but his eyes followed Rose as she moved swiftly about, like those of a suffering dog.

"We've got to give him a strong stimulant at once," declared Philip, his fingers on John's pulse. "Is there any whisky in the dispensary?"

"Not a drop. We had a little for just such emergencies, but the last was used up a week ago. Judd, don't you know where you can get us some?" demanded Rose.

"I reckon I dew . . . moonshine, fer Bud told me whar him and . . . and Mally had some hid

up near their old still, but . . . I don't guess that I'll get hit."

"*Judd!* What are you saying? We need it to save his life!"

"I wants tew hear him say, first, thet he didn't hev a hand, with Virgil, in killin' Malvary Amos!" the man answered, doggedly.

There was an instant of silence, for Rose was too shocked to answer at once. It was ended by John Hunter himself, saying in a scarcely audible whisper, "Virgil didn't kill . . . him. I . . . did."

"*John!* Oh, what are you saying? It isn't true. Never mind, don't try to talk, now." Rose turned to Judd and cried, "It doesn't make any difference, if it *is* true. We must save his life. Oh, hurry, Judd! What are you waiting for? You've got to *get* it, quick. Judd, would you be a . . . a murderer, too?"

"No. I don't reckon thet I can dew thet. I haint never liked him, and naow he's killed one uv my own blood, but . . . No, hit don't make no difference. I've been fightin' you-all, Rose. But you're right. I've been larnin', too. You've stood fer me when Gawd knows why you done hit, and I'll stick with you, naow. Yes, I'm a-goin'."

He hurried from the room, and she gently but firmly drove all the rest of the silent, curious gathering outside, with the exception of Philip and Camille, who were still busy dressing John's ugly wounds.

Then she returned to the bedside and, despite her own command that the injured man should not

talk, cried out in deep distress, "Oh, John! Why . . . *why* did you do it?"

"Wait, Rose. He's too weak to talk now. Perhaps, bye and bye . . ." began Philip, but John moved his head in faint contradiction and gasped, "There's no . . . 'bye and bye' . . . for me. I'm . . . done for."

"No, no, John. You'll come through. You're not going to die."

Again he made a weak gesture of negation. "No, he got me . . . too," he answered and closed his eyes. With a pitying touch Rose laid her hand upon his burning forehead, and her own eyes became misty.

He seemed to be smiling faintly. For a little while he remained silent, scarcely breathing, and twice she bent close to make sure that his heart had not actually ceased to beat. At her low command Camille brought more water and poured a little between his set teeth. Then he stirred and began to speak in disjointed whispered words which were scarcely more than rasping breaths. He was indeed too weak to talk, yet, despite his suffering, and the fact that his mental concepts were becoming more and more vague and illusive, his iron will was still in command over his failing faculties—and he had a message to deliver. There were many long hiatuses in the sentences which barely passed his lips, but the three who bent anxiously above him could fill them in and guess his story.

John's first words were a broken question. "Virgil . . . where . . . ? Judd said . . ."

It was Philip who responded, suddenly deciding that, if the man *were* to talk, a shock might have the effect of coördinating his wandering thoughts and bringing him sharply back to the present, if only for a moment. After all, *Virgil* must be saved.

"He's in jail . . . accused of killing Malvary. Do you understand, John? They say that *Virgil* shot him."

"I . . . killed him." Again came the unequivocal assertion. "Tell them . . . Virgil . . . innocent."

There was the sound of a deep sigh, as though from a heart too full of some great emotion for words, and Camille straightened up and walked, swaying a little, from the room. Her departure went unnoticed, nor did Rose know, until more than an hour later, that the girl, without telling anyone of her intention, had got Billy to help her saddle one of the mules and ridden off through the gathering twilight, on the twelve mile road to Fayville. What mattered the darkness to her when the greatest light of all shone, undimmed, within her breast?

"But Virgil was found there, with his own rifle . . . the rifle that killed Malvary," persisted Philip, and he was rewarded by seeing John start a little, as though the words touched the quick of his weakening brain.

Almost angrily, and in a considerably stronger voice the other answered, "I shot him, I say . . . with Virgil's gun. I . . . I . . . took . . ." A violent spasm of coughing ended his sentence, and the agony of it started the sweat from his face.

Rose gave him more water. Then she took his fevered hand, and said in a soothing tone, "We understand, John. Please do not try to talk any more."

He seemed willing to obey, and lay, gasping faintly, for a while.

Forgetful in her deep distress, that he might be able to hear her words, Rose turned to her brother and cried, "Oh, but why, Philip? Why do you suppose he did it?"

"Omie." The name fell from the barely moving lips of the wounded man in a rasping whisper. "Little sister."

"But what did he know about that? How did he learn—he wasn't here?" exclaimed Philip. "And what does he mean by 'little sister?' Poor fellow, the delirium is starting again. We've got to keep him quiet, if we can."

"Yes. You mustn't talk any more, John." Rose lowered her voice and continued, softly, "Omie's been 'little sister' to him almost from the day he came, poor fellow. They are as different as light and darkness, but her gaiety seemed to strike a hidden responsive cord in his reserved nature and he has been very fond of her—of all the family, indeed. Haven't you noticed it? It has made me very

happy, for he is such a lonely man, and I've loved to see Omie with him and hear her call him 'big brother,' as she almost always did. Yes, I'm beginning to understand how he must have felt when he learned, heaven knows how, what had happened; but that he should actually have done what . . . what Virgil threatened . . . ! Oh, Phil, who can understand the natures of passionate men?"

She wet John's lips with the water again. He roused himself from his lethargy, seeming almost visibly to shake off the coma into which his mind had been slipping, and spoke, in a still weaker voice, yet in a manner which indicated that he had heard part of her whispered words, at least sub-consciously.

"Omie. Virgil told Judd . . . what had . . . happened. I . . . I heard."

The two listeners started, and Rose bent down, close above him, and, gently stroking his head, asked, "How did you hear, John? Where were you?"

"Below . . . close to . . . porch. I had been walking . . . walking . . . walking all night . . ." The man's voice sounded inexpressibly weary, and the woman's heart cried out in pity for him as she visualized the agony which must have been his as he trod the path of his spiritual Golgotha through the darkness.

"Daylight." He paused as though struggling with an idea, perhaps that daylight had dawned upon his own mind, filled with deep shadows, when it did upon the world of men. "I was coming . . . home

. . . to ask . . . pardon, to tell Donald . . . everything. I was . . . afraid that he might blame . . . blame you . . . who were . . . blameless."

In sudden new terror, Rose laid her hand over his lips and cried, "Oh, hush."

But he turned his head, and labored on. It seemed as though his will alone were speaking, fulfilling a mission with which it had been charged and which must be completed before the spirit could depart—to rest. "I was . . . going to explain . . . and then . . . go.

"I saw you . . . and Virge . . . Virgil standing . . . on . . . porch. I thought he was looking . . . straight into my . . . face. He said . . . he said, 'I am going to . . . to *kill him*'."

The words which had burned themselves into John's brain as Virgil had uttered them, looking, it seemed, directly into his eyes, yet seeing him not, were uttered with surprising force. Then the man's voice dropped back to a feeble whisper, and he continued, "I thought . . . he meant me . . . I . . . I was . . . guilty. I started . . . to come . . . to you . . . to confess . . . all. But" He stopped, and again the strangling cough overcame him for a moment, and left him panting and deathly white. But he would go on, in spite of their pleas that he rest, and in like pain-filled utterances he told them how he had heard all that Virgil had told Judd, and how he had fairly run

from the spot with but one thought—to do what Virgil would have done, and kill Malvary. He had no rifle, but he knew where the other kept his, and he had taken it, intending to avenge the girl and then give himself up. But Malvary had seen him coming, and fired first. The rest was a blank. He could not describe what had happened except that at last he had fallen, down, down, from a rock onto which he had stumbled, blindly, after he was sure that the work which he had gone there to perform was done.

Then exhaustion overcame him again. He seemed no longer to be suffering, but gently slipping away from them, down among the shadows. As Rose bathed his face and moistened his parched and parted lips, she said with wonderment, to Philip, "How awful, and yet how strange it is! Who would have dreamed that a man of stone, like John Hunter, would have been aroused to do a thing like that, simply from overhearing Virgil's outburst—that he would have become obsessed by the insane idea of killing another who had injured a girl that was no more to him than a dear little friend? It isn't even as though he were a mountain man, with the feud spirit and hill code of honor inbred in him. I can understand it in Virgil, but not in *him*."

The sound of Virgil's name must have whipped up John's flagging intellect again, for he started, and gasped, "I saved . . . saved Virgil from . . . doing . . . hit. *I* killed him, I say . . . Like I killed . . . Judd Amos . . . fer. . . the

same reason . . . fer threatenin' another . . . another gal. I thought I . . . loved her. But hit warn't so. I haint never loved . . . but one woman . . . and she . . . warn't . . . fer me."

Rose and Philip looked sharply at one another in bewilderment. What did it mean, this strange assertion from a delirious tongue, and this no less strange mountain speech into which he had fallen? What transformation or reversion was taking place in his weakening brain?

He was speaking again, in mumbled words which they could catch only by leaning close to his scarcely moving lips. "Yes . . . Rose said . . . 'Virgil mustn't dew hit.' But hit hed to be . . . done."

Suddenly he changed the tense of his verbs as though he were living the moment of decision all over again. "I hev got tew . . . save Virgie . . . and . . . avenge . . . my . . . little sister."

White as the sheet upon which he lay, Rose abruptly seized the speaker by the shoulder in an almost frenzied clutch. "John, what are you saying!" she cried aloud. "*Who are you?*"

"I . . . I'm Joel . . . Joel Gayheart . . . I've got to . . . kill him . . . like I killed . . . his grandpappy. But . . . don't never tell them . . . Rose . . . mother."

"Mammy!" The final word rang out, clear and full, and charged with a great love and longing.

There was the sound of a stranger's voice speak-

ing to someone in the darkness of the porch outside the House of Happiness, an hour later. Rose heard it, and started for the door.

"My name's Johnson. I'm a United States Marshal up here looking for moonshiners," the voice was saying. "I caught this man up on the mountain, there, bootlegging away some illicit liquor from a cache. He says that his name is Judd Amos, and that he was getting it at the request of a doctor here, to save the life of a man who'd been shot. Is that so?"

She stepped out into the night, answering, "Yes, sir. That is the truth. Everyone will tell you that Judd Amos is a bitter foe of moonshiners and I sent him for the whiskey, for . . . for the reason he gaveBut it . . . it is too late."

CHAPTER IX

SUNSHINE

It was May-day at Smiling Pass.

If any of the mountain dwellers in what had almost ceased to be known as "Beaten Creek" had possessed such a thing as a calendar they might have insisted, with justification, that the first of May came on Sunday, and that Sunday would not be until the morrow, but Smiles had decreed that *this* was May-day, and that was sufficient.

A full month had passed by since the occurrence of that crowding series of tragic events which had threatened to result in complete disaster for the Community Center and its work but which had—through the perversity of the Fates, who ever love to weave their animated patterns in strongly contrasting shadows and highlights—ended by drawing its friends closer to it, and to those who carried it on. Sympathy is one road to understanding.

The strain of it all had left Rose spiritually shaken, for the moment, and Philip had thought it wise to extend his visit materially, in order to stay during the convalescence of both Donald and Omie—each of whom mended apace—in order to lend her his aid and encouragement. He had accordingly ar-

ranged, by wire and letter, with one of his Boston associates to continue in charge of his practice for the whole month; and it was he who fabricated and spread abroad the story of how John Hunter and Malvary Amos came to meet their violent deaths, weaving into it just enough strands of truth to satisfy his own conscience, and silence that of his sorrowing sister. Rose, however, had unburdened her soul by full confession to Donald and his love and comfort made her path easier to tread.

According to Philip, then, it had all been a matter of fatal accident, beginning with Omie's fall from the over-hanging rock. Malvary was exonerated of any wrong-doing, except of having followed her thither against the rules, and taking his terror-stricken flight. John—he was still "John Hunter" to everyone except the two who had listened to his astounding confession and Donald, who had heard it from their lips—had merely gone hunting on the mountain, having borrowed Virgil's rifle without telling him; there was nothing strange in that and all knew that he was a peculiar man of peculiar impulses. Malvary had been startled by his sudden appearance, armed, and shot first, in fear and misunderstanding, while John had fired in self-defense.

The story was not unplausible, and if any who heard it had their doubts of its entire veracity, they kept those doubts to themselves, honoring Philip the more for saving their beloved Smiles from further pain. John had never made any real friends outside

the family circle, but the neighbors honored him for his self-sacrificing labors on their behalf, performed—Rose, Donald and Philip now believed—in expiation of his youthful crime.

With spring shadows and sunshine intermingling, the days had fled past, and the two were almost forgotten except by those to whom they had been nearest, for they who dwell in the high hills are accustomed to tragic death. and remembrance is fortunately brief.

Then, too, there had been another reason for forgetting the past in anticipation of the future. Long before, a great event—the one concerning which Rose had hinted in her letter to Philip—had been announced for May-day, and those who lived in Smiling Pass, or had children at school there, had been eagerly looking forward to that anniversary day.

Now it had come, and, to the curious anticipations regarding what it held in store for their entertainment, had been added the interesting knowledge that there was to be—a wedding.

The morning had dawned gray and chill, with lowering skies; but, with the coming of early afternoon, Nature had relented—in direct answer to Billy Boy's earnest prayer, he confided to Margaret. Great billowy banks of clouds carried up and up the outline of the mountains, like snowy caps set on slopes which were decked with carnival green. Between them, at brief intervals, shone the sun, blazing with glory and sharing his wealth of gold with mankind in kingly prodigality.

During the noon recess Billy and other of the younger children had scoured the wooded slopes for nature's floral offerings, and every available glass and pitcher held big sprays of dogwood and redbud blossoms, bunches of tender white bloodroot flowers, flaming orange bells of the wild honeysuckle, purple cranesbill, arbutus, violets and early sprays of the delicately pink mountain laurel.

Never had the neighborhood known such a festal day, and the mountain people, outwardly unemotional yet thrilling at heart, early began to arrive from up-creek and down-creek and over the shadowy passes through the hills—more of them than had attended the Preachin'; yes, more than had come for the first Christmas-tree, for no wintry snows prevented them, and spring clearing and planting was so nearly done that they could leave it cheerfully. The invitation to come to Smiling Pass had been sent forth broadcast, and purposely worded with a vagueness calculated to arouse curiosity, and the mystery about what was on foot doubled the interest.

As a matter of fact, the Council—lead for the time not by Rose, but by the enthusiastic Margaret—had planned the affair with a deeper purpose than mere entertainment. An object lesson is, to the childlike mind, of far greater value as a teacher than any verbal exposition, and, although they had no intention of bringing their guests there in expectation of entertainment, merely to disseminate propaganda

—no matter how subtly—they had high hopes that at last they might be known by their works. If any should come and see, and depart therefrom without having caught at least a feeble gleam of the vision which *they* followed, they would be blind, indeed.

To that end, then, Margaret had laid her plans. The visiting throng had been greeted at the steps of the House of Happiness and informed that the program of festivities would not commence until three o'clock, when the bell rang for the cessation of labor for the week; but that they were heartily welcome to make the place their own, go where they would, and see for themselves what manner of things their off-spring were doing as they traveled along the road to understanding, whose three great milestones were Service, Self-reliance and Leadership.

With timid curiosity they first entered the two doors of the House of Service—a veritable beehive of industry, it seemed to them. In one big, bright room they found their smiling daughters, neatly clad and happily engaged, unsupervised, in weaving baskets and wonderful “kivver-lids,” which the toil-worn fingers of their hopeless mothers touched with almost reverent delight. In another were the older of their smiling sons, importantly busy at printing press and typewriter, performing many a novel task, almost beyond the comprehension of their listless fathers, with ease and accuracy.

Then, while the men were led away by Virgil and Donald to see the garden and the road, the women

were invited by Margaret and Rose into the sacred precincts of the spotless kitchen, with only one proviso; that they keep the screen door shut. And there they beheld other of their girls with Mrs. Gayheart and Omie—now again as sweet as a wild rose—engaged in learning something as old as the ages under the strange new name of “domestic science,” and preparing with a cleanliness which was alike fascinating and almost appalling, savory viands which were later simultaneously to furnish the wedding feast and satisfy the every-day hunger of the multitude.

Their menfolk were meanwhile leaning on the paling fence and slowly grasping the significance of the scene before *their* eyes.

Almost two years before, the unspeakable road, which led from Fayville twenty miles into the heart of the hills had undergone a magic transformation at the spot where it curved through Smiling Pass. The cloudburst had sadly injured its smooth surface, however. Gullies and mudholes had again made their appearance, and the little boys, who had learned to take immeasurable pride in it, had wondered and become almost rebellious when their Margaret had forbidden them to make the customary repairs. But now they understood, and were working with a will, bringing big rocks and little stones, sawdust from the sawmill and gravel from the edge of the creek, so that their fathers might learn through them what could be done, with a minimum of labor, to

provide a real highway over which civilization might enter unto them. And many a mountaineer who, during his whole life, had daily ridden his plodding mule through, or around, a deep mud hole before his very door, scratched his head or rubbed his chin with new thoughtfulness.

But work, even though it be done with a smile, is but part of the training for a well-balanced life, and when the three o'clock bell peeled out its message there was an eager exodus from the House of Service and the finished road, and a few moments later the visitors were treated to a new surprise. For Virgil's base-ball nine appeared on the run from the Boys' dormitory, arrayed in complete uniforms, with SMILING PASS lettered across their breasts—Philip had sent home for them and had them made in record time.

Then those who watched with eager interest, though with little real understanding, saw what team play could do, and heard—with surprise, until Donald and Philip explained—the applause when one of *their* team was put out after making a sacrifice hit. Their larger opponents, boys of the neighborhood, but not of the school, fought hard, but vainly, to check the victorious sweep of the well-trained team in the five inning contest. They were snowed under and held scoreless themselves, whereupon the individualistic men of the mountains cheered—and then once more rubbed their chins or scratched their heads, reflectively.

Again it was the little boys' turn, and, although none of them were yet ready to be received into the official fold of the Boy Scouts, even as tenderfeet, they performed their work with enthusiasm and with what seemed to their observers an astonishing skill. And many a silent mother's heart swelled with painful happiness as she heared the voice of her little son ring out, true and strong, on the last words of the pledge—"to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

But all this, and the lively fire-drill during which a fierce imaginary blaze on the roof of the House of Happiness was extinguished amid much laughter and many cries of encouragement—what mattered it if the excited boys poured most of the water down the chimney, to the woeful suttly detriment of the study floor?—were but preliminaries to that which was in store!

For now the girls came shyly forth from their rooms, flushing rosily with pride in their new, dainty muslin dresses and silken sashes, and under Margaret's direction, began the ancient dance which never grows old; the dance of the May pole. There were gasps of astonishment and now open delight from sober mothers and fathers. Could these radiant young creatures, so lovely in their becoming garb, which displayed their youthful necks and rounded arms, so graceful, so gay and so *clean*, be the offspring whom they had always deeply loved, to be sure, but regarded as like unto themselves—with

all that that implied—then and forever? Eyes, like those of Versie Tittle, which had once been so red and dulled by disease, now were sparkling brightly, even if through spectacles prematurely worn, and other eyes which watched the happy children, at last heirs to childhood's meed of happiness, grew suddenly blurred. *Their* children—not like the hogs but *unlike* them.

But someone blundered. It had been forgotten that Camille would at that hour be arraying herself as a bride, and one long pink ribbon hung, unclaimed and in seeming sorrow, until Donald caught up his baby, tossed her to his broad shoulder and bore her, shrieking with delight, to seize the fluttering end. Then there was laughter indeed, and the spectators shouted their approval as he—a boy at heart again—danced gaily around the pole, while the sunbeams danced among the weaving hues. Only one did not join in the laughter, for Rose turned and fled to her room for a moment, so that none should see her tears of overflowing happiness.

When this, too, was done, and the hand-hewn forest pole dressed in its garb of many colors, Camille came forth to meet Virgil and Preacher Paul under the natural canopy formed by the giant sycamore. Then there were more delighted gasps and whispered words of unfeigned pleasure, for never had the mountain folk seen so sweet a picture of budding womanhood as was this "queer furrin' gal," whom they all loved, dressed in simple white, with flowing

veil and orange blossoms—all the gift of her own Smiles. The simple ceremony took but a few moments and was performed with a solemnity which all felt, but few could understand. Absent was all the customary clamor and wild hilarity that made the nuptials which *they* knew little better than travesties upon a sacred rite.

Camille's dark eyes shone with a new and tender radiance which made Margaret whisper in her ear, "I actually envy you, dear," as she held her close.

"Wait," answered the joyful girl.

Of course some of the younger men wanted to follow the example of Donald and Philip, and kiss the bride. But Virgil would have none of it, and laughingly threatened to sound the fire alarm and have the claimants of that ancient privilege doused with water from the creek, whereupon they thought best to desist, but taunted him with being parsimonious.

Now evening had come—the hour when the world mysteriously changes from "dusky dark tew plumb dark," as Humpty Hite once put it. In the big dining hall the long tables had been cleared away for the fourth and final time, and the contented guests were all crowded into the House of Friendliness, now bright with the dazzling illumination shed by every available gasoline lamp.

The hubbub of their entry had died away, and an expectant hush settled over the throng, for the one

moment which all knew to be scheduled had at last arrived. A competition that had inaugurated a whole year before was ended, the rewards were to be distributed, and many a middle-aged heart beat as fast in fearful expectation as that of any schoolboy on examination day. For not the children of Smiling Pass alone, but many of the older folk of the neighborhood had shared already in the sweet waters which flowed from the new spring of knowledge on the hillside. It had been carried straight into their homes—in limited amounts, to be sure—by Virgil, Rose and Margaret, in accordance with the first named's suggestion, made on the night when he had unfolded his vision in the little cabin at Webb's Gap. Truly the older generation could not go to school, but to those who had showed themselves eager to open their doors and their hearts, "book larnin'" had been carried on at least one evening in every week. And now those who had also been faithful over a few things were openly to receive their reward.

Rose had begged first Donald and then Virgil to act as master of ceremonies, but each had hastened to decline—the latter from embarrassment, the former lest, unwittingly, he "put his foot in it" again. So it was Rose who now stood facing the expectant crowd, her lips sweetly serious, but the most bewitching of smiles lurking among the purple shadows of her wonderful, deep blue eyes.

"First of all," she began, "I am going to call on Versie to recite to us a little verse, which she wrote

well. For we know, you and I, that our mountains and our mountain life are alike mostly in shadow, now. We want to let the sunlight in—the kind that shines within the heart, born of happiness. And happiness, I think, is the child of healthy bodies and souls filled with high ideals. We are doing what we can to help all acquire, and keep, both.

“If you think that we are beginning to succeed, and that a new day is really being born, here, it is not for you to thank the doctor, Miss Treville and me, but Virgil Gayheart, who filled us with the desire to serve, and Humpty Hite, who was the first to bring us here and make our work possible.

“All that we, here, are doing, or can do, is to help to train and strengthen the mountain youths so that they may lead others along that road and to that goal. Our task must soon be laid down for them to pick up and carry on. And they can do it—*will* do it. Oh, the happiness we have found in the work, in spite of all the difficulties! To love and to be loved; to have the desire to serve and the opportunity to share in a splendid service, what greater happiness can man or woman have than that?”

Rose's eyes grew misty and her voice broke a little. Then she smiled again and continued, brightly, “But why am I saying all this? You know it already and you have seen for yourselves what your children are accomplishing. And now you are eager to hear the names of those fathers and mothers who have also entered our little obstacle race along the Road to Understanding.

"As we told you racers, the certificates of merit would not be given, necessarily, to those who went the furthest, but rather to those who ran the best, considering the obstacles which each had to overcome. And all of you realize, now, I'm sure, that our prizes are not the *real* reward, but that each has already received that in learning how to read and write."

"Thet air a fact," came booming out in Bill Cress' deep voice.

"That's right, Bill. Well, we have decided that first place in the contest is shared by . . . Humpty Hite and Mrs. Zenas Tittle, and, since ladies always come first, I will ask her to step forward now, and get her certificate and a ten dollar gold piece prize, which Dr. Bentley has given in addition."

Amid thunderous applause and stamping of feet in approval, the thin, weary-looking woman walked forward to receive the first prize and reward of merit which she had ever known in her shadow-filled life. With tears of gratitude running down her furrowed cheeks, she turned and stammered, "I didn't aim fer tew git no prize and I haint deservin' uv hit, although I won't say as haow I kaint use the money, being plumb bare-footed, whatever. But ef I could choose a-tween them, I'd sooner hev my eddication, fer naow I kin read outern the Bible fer myself.

"Two years ago I was plum ignerrant, in . . . in every way. And when my least one . . . my baby . . . died I was . . . wicked, too, But Smiles,

hyar, she cum and read tew me, outern the SAMS in the Bible, and I seen the light. And naow, ef Versie was tew die tonight I could be a heap more comfortable fer I could read them SAMS fer myself and I wouldn't hev tew wait fer nobody with larnin' tew cum tew me in my misery. But I don't aim tew speak uv dyin', at this time and place. Hit's fer we-uns tew live more fully thet Smilin' Pass is hyar, I reckon. I guess I'm keepin' Hite from gettin' his'n."

Now it was Humpty's turn to speak. He came forward, bent and pitiable in body, but with the light of conquest in his eyes, and said, "Naow I aims tew make *myself* heard. Smiles, hyar, hes told you-all thet I brung the furriners tew Beaten, and hit's so. I give them the spot whar the House of Happiness sets, and I deeded them the rest uv the land uv my fathers—I writ my name on the deed—and I reckon I sold hit tew them plumb cheap, too. But I haint regrettin' hit one mite; I'd hev give hit tew them, ef I could; I'd give them all I hev, ef they needed hit. Two things I take the chieftest pride in, today, folks. One uv them is thet I've learned haow tew read *and* write a-fore I died; and the other is thet I hev helped tew start givin' Beaten Creek, and *all* the maountings, back tew the U-nited States of Ameriky."

At last all of the other rewards had been distributed, the final one going to "Bad Bill" Cress, and, as he awkwardly advanced to receive it, Rose said, "Bill, I know that you are rather a man of action

than words. Instead of trying to make us a pretty speech won't you sing your famous 'moonshine' song? We would all love to hear it."

"I will ef you likes. Reckon most uv you-all know haow I cum tew write this hyar song, folks, but maybe some uv you don't. Wall, hit was this way. Me and my brother hed a little still up thar on the maounting, yonder, and the revenooers cum fer tew bust hit up. Wall, one uv the U-nited States marshals happened tew get killed and *we* hed tew get aout." A sally of laughter greeted his naive statement. "We went over tew Black Maounting where the hills are harder tew climb, and, jest tew pass the time, started up another little still, thar. Wall, one night when brother waraway I sot keepin' the kettle boilin', so tew say, and sorter whistlin' and hummin' tew myself and the words of thishyar song jest popped intew my mind, whatever."

He cleared his throat and began, to sing lustily a lilting simple melody the verses to which ran:

"Daown under the hill thar sat a little still,
and its smoke curled up tew the sky.

You could *eas'ly* tell by the whiffle uv the smell, thar
was licker in the air close by.

Yes, licker in the air close by, and thar haint many
knows hit but a few,

So pull off your coat and wet up your throat, with
the good old maounting dew.

"Oh, here's tew the pill thet cures all ill, hit was
made from the malt and the rye,

You could *easy* tell by the whiffle uv the smell, thar was lickin in the air close by.

Yes, lickin in the air close by, and thar haint many knows hit, you see;

Ses, 'won't your Honor please fill up these jugs, these two little jugs fer me'."

When the laughter and cheers had ended, he said, seriously, "I hev quit makin' moonshine, fer good, and intend tew try instead tew make some uv thet thar kind uv *sunshine* thet Rose hes been tellin' us abaout."

She smiled her appreciation as she led the applause. Then she said, "And now we're going to end a wonderful day by having a real old-time mountain dance. Our dear old blind fiddler—Versie's grandpappy—has come especially to help others be happy; we have a banjo and I am sure that at least half a dozen of you men can take turns at 'picking' it. Juddy, you used to be the best 'caller out' at Webb's Gap. Do you think that you have forgotten how to . . .?"

"I don't guess thet I *have*," interrupted Judd, decisively, all at once filled with the spirit of the occasion. "Push back, folks. Clear the floor and pick your partners—yes, sweethearts, if you like. If Rose'll let Bill sing thet 'Whiffle uv the still' song of his'n, reckon thet all rules are out uv workin' order at Smiling Pass, tonight."

Amid great hilarity sixteen couples were formed

and took their places. The fiddle and the banjo were put in tune, and swung into the toe-tapping rhythm of "Black-eyed Susie."

"That's the ticket, Joe," exclaimed the new master of ceremonies. "'Hop up, skip up, Black-eyed Susie. Mighty good-lookin' but the boys won't choose ye.' Can't say as much abaout the good-lookin' gals aout hyar on the floor. Ready, all? Let's go! *All hands up and circle tew the left. Swing your partners and the one you meet!*"

With the stamping of many heavy feet upon the bare boards and the rhythmic clapping of hands by the on-lookers, the dance was started.

Donald had become a little tired, and departed to the House of Happiness to relieve Veda Thornsberry, who had sacrificially volunteered to stay with the baby, and now Rose stole away from the merry crowd to join him for a moment. As she slipped outside into the cool light of the newly risen moon, she almost bumped into Virgil and Camille, close in each other's arms. They hastily separated, and she laughed, "Shame, shame! Well, I'll have to forgive you. Judd has decreed that the rule against sweethearting is in abeyance tonight, and *married* sweethearts are exempt, anyway, I suppose." She kissed the happy, blushing girl, pressed Virgil's hand and ran on.

"*Don't forget your honey,*" came through the still air in Judd's voice.

In the deep shadow, thrown by the steps up to

the high porch, stood two more figures, close together, and she was upon them before she had become aware of their presence.

"Philip! Margaret! What has got into everybody, tonight? Is it the moon?" Something in the expression on the girl's face as she stepped out into the clear, white radiance caused Rose to stop, with her own heartbeat quickening. "Oh. . . . Oh, have I interrupted . . . something important?" she cried.

"Well, *rather*," answered Philip. "You've butted into the most important moment of my life, and if, as a result, Margaret says 'No,' I shall lay the blame on you for the rest of your days."

"First couple lead out on a wild goose chase."

Margaret laughed, a little unsteadily. "Juddy is wrong. It isn't 'a wild goose chase.' Oh, Smiles, I love you too much to bring such a life-sentence upon you," she whispered.

"Margaret! Then it is 'yes'?"

"Of course it is, you dear, *tame* goose. You have said that these dear mountains have made a new woman out of me, and if you had not asked me, tonight, I had fully made up my mind to be a 'new woman' in a different sense, and propose to you. The idea of your going home, day after tomorrow" She sobbed, suddenly, and, despite the presence of his sister, Philip caught her in his close embrace.

"Lady 'round the lady and the gent go slow. Lady

'round the gent, and the gent don't go!'" came up through the darkness.

"You two darlings!" cried Rose, throwing her arms about both of them.

For a moment the three mutual lovers chatted happily. Then Smiles said, "I suppose that you will be taking Margaret back home soon, Philip."

"'Home'? You bet I will, if I can tear her away from my rival, Virgil's Cause," he answered.

"It isn't . . . it has never been your rival, Phil. It is just as much a part of your heart as it is mine, and Smiles', and we'll come back to take our share in it just as often as we can. Won't we, dear?"

"We certainly shall. And you, Rose! What are you planning to do, now that Donald is well again?"

"Do, I think, just as you are planning to. We have talked it all over, seriously, already. Virgil, Camille and the older mountain boys must learn to walk alone soon, if our real purpose is to be carried out. Of course we mean to continue to handle the financial end for a long time, yet, give them our moral support during the winter and spend most of our summers here, as well. But first—this is a great secret—Donald and I are planning to run away from everyone and have a second honeymoon in my dear old cabin at Webb's Gap. Oh, how happy we are going to be there 'alone together'."

"Fine. And that means, I suppose, that at last you are ready to take up my offer of two years ago, and let me have Smiles, Junior?"

"Indeed we are not! She is part of us—the most precious part of our bodies and souls. Hark!"

From within the House of Happiness came the sound of a sleepy little voice, followed by a tender deep one, saying, "Muvver, I want a drink," and "Daddy will get it for you, sweetheart."

"*Promenade all the way home,*" chanted Judd, below.

THE END

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